

SPECIAL YEAR-END DOUBLE ISSUE • WHY WEST COAST RAP RULES

VIBE

O.J.'s Main Man

Does superlawyer *Johnnie Cochran* have the juice to get him off?

15 Years of Hip Hop: The Ultimate History

Vanessa Williams

The Bliss of
the Spider Woman

Digable Planets
Aaron Hall's dog pound
Ill Al Skratch
and...
Slick Rick breaks out

R. KELLY

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FEATURES

DECEMBER 1994 / JANUARY 1995 • VOLUME 2, NUMBER 10

52 SUPERFREAK

R. KELLY's sweet voice and raunchy lyrics carried him from Chicago street corners to triple-platinum record sales. Now R&B's Man of the Year faces troubling allegations that he secretly married his 15-year-old protégée, Aaliyah.

By Daryl Smith. Photographs by Dana Lixenberg

58 TO THE RESCUE

JOHNNIE COCHRAN has made a career—and a fortune—fighting the power. But does he have the juice to get O.J. off?

By Sylvester Monroe

64 CLIP: CHANGING FACES

Another C and G music factory. By Chris Wilder

FIFTEEN YEARS OF HIP HOP

66 BACK IN THE DAYS

Most of what you know about the old school is wrong. By Frank Owen

71 TIME BOMB

Clocking the history of hip hop 15 years after "Rapper's Delight." By Harry Allen

78 HOW THE WEST WAS WON

If the sun rises in the East, how come the West Coast is grabbing all the loot?

By Cheo H. Coker

82 CRIB: AARON HALL

It's a dizzy day world. By Mimi Valdes

84 NOOOOOO ESCAAAPE!

Busting heads at the Ultimate Fighting Championship. By Nathaniel Wize

86 IN THE COMFORT ZONE

VANESSA WILLIAMS has conquered Broadway, *Billboard*, and the flap over her steamy 1984 pictorial, but she's saved the best for last. By Christian Wright

92 BACK LIKE DAT

With the release of *Blowout Comb*, DIGABLE PLANETS drop the hepcat pose and get back to their roots. By Kevin Powell

94 CLIP: ROSHUMBA

Natural-born beauty. By Deborah Gregory

Continued...

ON THE COVER AND ABOVE
R. Kelly photographed by Dana Lixenberg

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F A S H I O N

97 DINNER FOR TWO?

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Photographs by Geoffroy de Boismenu

D E P A R T M E N T S

18 CONTRIBUTORS

21 MAIL

27 START

Representin' History.
By Michael Eric Dyson

*Plus: Grant Hill beats out Jason Kidd.
MICKEY MOUSE Unrapped.

The "Tupac defense." Rufus & Tyrone.
Black Rush Limbaugh. Rap toys.

*32 IN THE MIX
*36 STIX & STÖNZ: Food for Thought.

By Böenz Malone
*38 YOUNG WORLD: Childhood

Lockdown. By Da Ghetto Communicator
*40 MORALES & BAKER: Yo, X-It!

45 NEXT

ILL AL SKRATCH make a shout-out.
The SONGCATCHERS unite.

B-Girls: BILLY LAWRENCE, BRIGETTE
McWILLIAMS, BRANDY, and BROWNSTONE.
KRISTINE W. feels what she wants.

107 LOOK

SHEKYL LEE RALPH. By Scott Ponson-Bryant
For SHOOT! The Forces.

GEAR: Backpack vest. ART: Daniel
Simmons. POSE: Crystal Waters.

ART: Esther Mahlangu.

110 VIDEO DIRECTOR OF

THE MONTH: Chuck Stone III.

TREND: Heavy D's metallica.

HAIR: Blackgirl's short cuts.

*112 WORD: Coffee-Table Talk.

TUBE: *Cosmic Slop*.

*114 WORD: Ntozake Shange's *Liliane*.

TECH: Home DJ.

TUBE: Reggae on Video.

119 REVOLUTIONS

REVIEWS: SLICK RICK.

By Sacha Jenkins

*Plus: Terry Ganzie and Sluggy Ranks.

Dr. Dre. Black Sheep. Brand Nubian.

Roberta Flack. *White Men Can't Wrap*.

R.E.M. Scarface. Rapa Iti.

James Carter. Fu-Schnickens.

Horace Brown. A Few Good Men.

*124 LEGENDS: The Shirelles.

By Greil Marcus

*126 SINGLE FILE. By James Hunter

*128 XMAS ROUNDUP. By Amy Linden

Special Ed. By Bobbito Garcia

*132 THE REAL MUSIC:

Joshua Redman/Weather Report.

By Greg Tate

*134 BOOM SHOTS:

The year in dancehall. By Rob Kenner

*135 DISCO TECH:

The year in dance. By Frank Owen

152 PROPS

Lieutenant Uhura:

Actress Nichelle Nichols.

By Robert Morales

RIGHT

Vanessa Williams photographed
by Ruven Afanador; styling by Patti
Wilson; hair by Michael Boardi for
Atlantis New York; makeup by
James Kandor for M.A.C.;
slip-dress and patent leather
mix by Betsey Johnson

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DOZE

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Illustrator/painter Doze Green describes his drawing for "Back in the Days" (page 66) as "cubist/surrealist, representing the first and second generations of hip hop. I'm breaking down letters [in this case the letter D] and turning them into people." Green was a New York graffiti artist in the '70s and '80s. Now he designs clothes for Kick/Wear and for his own clothing company, NUT (Nasty Urban Trash); paints murals for films and gallery exhibitions in New York and L.A.; does illustrations for Ice-T's Rhyme Syndicate; and lately has been working as art director for a late-night hip hop talk show called *Flavorhood*.



HARRY

Media assassin Harry Allen says the most startling thing about writing "Time Bomb" (page 71) was "realizing just how much has happened since 1979 and how much has to be left out. It was humbling to try and tell a people's story." Allen, immortalized in the lyrics of Public Enemy's 1988 hit "Don't Believe the Hype," recently cofounded the Rhythm-Cultural Institute, a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and promoting hip hop culture. He also just launched a publication called *rap dot com* about hip hop and the information superhighway.



MASHA AND PATTI

Rock critic Greil Marcus celebrates the Shirelles in the Revolutions section this month (page 124). He's a columnist for *Interview* and has had four books published, most recently *Ranters & Crowd Pleasers* (Doubleday)... Christian Wright, who profiled Vanessa Williams (page 86), is a senior writer at *Allure* and contributes frequently to *Rolling Stone* and *New York* magazine.... University of North Carolina professor Michael Eric Dyson wrote "Representing History" (page 27) in this issue. He's the author of *Making Malcolm: The Myth and Meaning of Malcolm X* (Oxford) and the forthcoming *From God to Gangsta Rap: Notes on Black Culture* (Oxford)... French photographer Geoffroy de Boismenu shot "Dinner for Two?," VIBE's year-end fashion story (page 97). His work has appeared in *Entertainment Weekly*, *Paper*, *Out*, and *Interview*.... VIBE stylists-at-large Masha Calloway and Patti Wilson (pictured at left) collaborated on "Dinner for Two?"



CHEO

In "How the West Was Won" (page 78), Cheo H. Coker, 22, tackles the question of why West Coast rap is selling right now. Born and raised in Connecticut and now living in Oakland, Coker appreciates both coasts. He says, "The issue shouldn't be East vs. West, but good hip hop—and both have it. Instead of getting angry, New Yorkers should support their artists by buying their records." Coker is the Scene & Heard columnist for the *San Francisco Bay Guardian*; writes for *The Source*, *Essence*, *Urb*, and *Rolling Stone*; and is cowriting the film version of Brian Cross's book *It's Not About a Salary: Rap, Race & Resistance in Los Angeles*.



RUVEN

Colombia-born photographer Ruven Afanador says of Vanessa Williams ("In the Comfort Zone," page 86), "Usually she's photographed looking really sexy, but in these photographs she looks interesting, classical, and glamorous. There's nothing trendy about these pictures; they are timeless." Afanador shot MC Shell Ndegé Ocello for VIBE's December/January 1994 issue and Byron Lars in September 1993. He has contributed to German *Elle*, *GQ*, *Rolling Stone*, and *Mirabella*.



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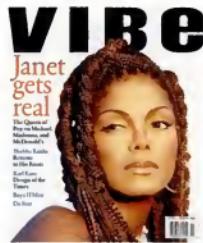
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How is it that the editors of VIBE could in good taste write on the cover, "Janet Gets Real" ("Working Girl," October)? Miss Janet is far from real. She'd have to be rid of her "real" upturned nose, and her "natural" golden brown hair. I admire Janet as a talent, but her beauty brings to mind the gravity-defying Barbie doll image that the fashion industry is forcing on us as the norm. Growing up, no one I knew wanted to be Janet; she was Michael's fat little sister. If everyone had the money Janet has, they could look exactly like her if they wanted to. LAUREN COOPER, WASHINGTON, DC



Let me tell you the truth about Janet Jackson. She is beautiful and talented, and despite a dismal script, she did a great job with the Justice character in *Poetic Justice*. So why do her critics want to see her fail so badly? Because she is toppling the Madonna icon and the European idea of success. They can't stand to see a sista on top. But we, her fans, love her. And as long as we do, the multifaceted diamond that is Janet will continue to shine. ROBERT JONES JR., BROOKLYN, NY

I thought the Janet Jackson story would discuss her feelings on Michael and her supposed bad feelings toward Madonna. Well, what I learned was that she feels what happened to Michael was "crap" and that as far as Madonna goes—Janet listened close when her mother taught her about being nice. I didn't get what the cover suggested. What I did get from the article is that Danyel Smith thinks Janet has a 15-pound ass, she's trying to be down, she may or may not be intelligent, and that she has "kinda corny, upper-middle-class notions of blackness" (whatever that means). In the end, this article seemed obnoxious and unclear. It left me, an eight-year Janet fan, confused and frustrated. JENIQUE JONES, NEW YORK, NY

I am buzzing in response to "Hero Today" by Kevin Powell [Start, October]. I feel compelled to remind my fellow African-Americans that, guilty or not of murder, there is nothing heroic about beating a female. (Ironically, the supporters sporting O.J. paraphernalia and opinion, namely Tupac and Flav, are alleged perpetrators of that same evil deed.) It is beyond time we started redefining who the true heroes of our glorious culture are: W.E.B. Du Bois, Mandela, bell hooks, Maxine Waters, James Baldwin, to name a small few. Our true heroes are numerous and exist in many aspects of life today—in literature, music, politics, medicine—not only athletics. I suggest one look elsewhere, if not inward, for our heroes, and not rely solely on mainstream media for proper coverage. LESLIE HARRIS, LOS ANGELES, CA

I was fuming when I read Kevin Powell's slice of the media-hype pie ("Hero Today," Start, October), not necessarily because of Powell but at the whole O.J.

Simpson situation. People saying he's innocent are just as wrong as the people saying he did it. None of them have been presented with the full spectrum of evidence. At the very least, O.J. is a wife beater. Regardless of whether it makes the news, black men beat and kill women—white and black—and it's just as horrifying when a white man does it. The value of a person's life should not be based on the color of their skin, right? So I really don't see any reason for anyone to feel sorry for O.J. Also, Tupac really needs to check himself for his comment. I don't think anyone would mistake him for an angel! You want to talk about evil? Evil is any man who beats up his kids' mama. SHAUNA BROWN, LOS GATOS, CA

Quentin Tarantino says that a word with the power to inflame like nigger should be shouted from the top of buildings to take away that power ("A Bloody Pulp," October). I wonder if he'd take the same view of a word that personally degrades and dehumanizes people of his ethnic background. While I enjoy the audacious violence, nihilism, morbid humor, and trashy '70s revivalism of Tarantino's films, I hope that his increasing use of black actors will lead to a more balanced view of minorities in his work. CHUCK MABRY, FT. WASHINGTON, MD

I've studied Public Enemy for years! Some people criticize their new album, *Muse Sick-N-Hour Mess Age*, and have begun dissin' them, but Public Enemy will always be the muthafuckin' bomb

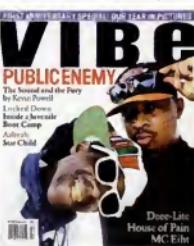
in my book! No rap group has influenced rap like Public Enemy, so y'all folks can get off that dis shit and give Public Enemy their damn props! SAMUEL WILLIAMS, COLUMBUS, GA

Kevin Powell writes that Public Enemy's *Greatest Misses* "was an artistic and critical disaster" ("Enemy Territory," September). I wholeheartedly disagree. "Hit da Road Jack," "Air Hoodlum," and "Tie Goes to the Runner" all stand up to previous PE classics. Moreover, "Louder Than a Bomb" represents, at the highest level yet, the intensity of PE's music. MATTHEW F. GIBLIN, ALBANY, NY



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DAVID RITCHIE, CHICAGO, IL

As one who is convinced that Professor Lani Guinier is one of the most innovative and mature social thinkers that this country has produced in the last quarter century, I was greatly gratified at the high-minded approach of Robert Morales's interview, which allowed Guinier a platform to explain and explore her social vision. And through the system. The idea that silence is golden—and that you can play the game until you reach a certain position, and then change up when you get in—is totally bogus. The process will most likely corrupt you, and you will end up selling out. Thank you, Professor Guinier, for taking a stand beyond. PAUL LEE, HIGHLAND PARK, MI

After reading Kevin Heldman's article, "Shock Treatment" [September], I was again upset at how the correctional institutions handle our young offenders. They're sent to these boot camps to supposedly get discipline, but all they seem to learn is that they're at the bottom of the pole, just like in the real world. In these camps they have no opinions, no stimulation, no reason to advance. They're only trained to do menial labor, and these young males view janitoring just like they do a job at McDonald's—they don't want to be seen working there, and they're not paid enough. If these camps are supposedly to challenge their values, why not challenge their minds as well? Are the corrections officers scared at what they may find?

GENEA THOMAS, JACKSONVILLE, FL

Thank you for Robert Morales's informative, insightful interview with Lani Guinier ["Lani Guinier Stands Firm," September]. I'm ashamed to admit it, but I wasn't exactly up on the details of the whole controversy surrounding Clinton's withdrawal of his nomination of Guinier to the Justice Department. I appreciate the fact that Morales didn't focus his questions on Bill Clinton or "the immensely gratified controversy" but allowed Guinier to talk about the things she believes in. She said many things which allowed Guinier a platform to democratic process and her assertions about staying true to your ideals as you negotiate your way through the system. The idea that silence is golden—and that you can play the game until you reach a certain position, and then change up when you get in—is totally bogus. The process will most likely corrupt you, and you will end up selling out. Thank you, Professor Guinier, for taking a stand beyond. PAUL LEE, HIGHLAND PARK, MI

I'm going to run out and buy *The Tyranny of the Majority* tomorrow! CHARISSE M. WILLIAMS, ITHACA, NY

What's up with Wu-Tang Clan? I've been with VIBE for a year, and not once have I seen any articles or commentaries on Wu-Tang. The one time I did see something was in your September issue [Start, In the Mix] and you wrote the wrong name. The man in the picture was not Method Man; it was Ol' Dirty Bastard. So for all of us true Wu fans, how about an in-depth interview with Wu-Tang? And please include the fan club address. INTEGRA GRANT, ST. PETERSBURG, FL

Editor's Note: For a "true Wu fan," shame on you: (1) VIBE was the first national magazine to cover the group—in September '93; (2) that is, in fact, Method Man in the photograph. You can fully enter the Wu-Tang by writing to: Wu-Tang Clan Fan Club, P.O. Box 010642, Staten Island, N.Y. 10301.

A sign of the times.



Excuse me. Ann Powers, but your review of *One Night Say*, by Billy Lawrence, was wack [Revolutions, September]! "Pop" this and "pop" that—the only "pop" I heard was a blood vessel in my head when I read the generic cheap job you did on her. Young artists like Billy Lawrence, Terri & Monica, the Brand New Heavies, Arrested Development, Seal, and others are kicking open the millennium for us and all who would follow. Unconsciously, effortlessly, these artists are mining our musical roots and adding their own shit while devising new paradigms for us to live and groove to in this block hole/Amerikkka. Gangster rap and hip hop were the primal screams of ghetto youth in response to the nihilism and marginalism of their existence. Obviously, some reviewers got high on the fumes from the carnage our artists brilliantly described and mistook it for the final act. It may be exciting to watch chaos and mayhem from a safe distance while applauding the exoticism of the natives, but we that live amid it are groping for light. So step outside. Miss Ann—the natives are restless again. And it looks like they're about to flip the script. All of this is too esoteric or too grounded in reality for you to absorb. But for those of us out here living this shit, Billy has said plenty—and we're expecting even more on her next album. LANELLE DAUGHERTY, RICHMOND, VA

I noted with great inter-

est "VIBE's Top 10 Movie

Soundtracks of All Time"

[Props, August]. Some of

the records I haven't had the

pleasure of listening to, like

Miles Davis's *Ascenseur* JESSICA RUPERT, KULA, MAUI, HI

Pour l'Échafaud, Jimmy Cliff's *The Harder They Come*, and *Wild*

Style. But I felt you might have forgotten one outstanding sound-

track: *New Jack City*. Also, the *Mo' Money* soundtrack is at

least equal to *Boomerang*. LAMAR BUYCKS, LANSING, MI

I thought that the pictures throughout the year were the best they could be. But after seeing "Flashback" [September], I realize I was wrong. As powerful, insightful, and entertaining as the articles are, the pictures make VIBE what it is. The images shown in the magazine are powerful and really bring you to the story by enhancing the moods of the subject. I hope that you continue to use such talented photographers in the future.

JESSICA RUPERT, KULA, MAUI, HI

Pour l'Échafaud, Jimmy Cliff's *The Harder They Come*, and *Wild*

Style. But I felt you might have forgotten one outstanding sound-

track: *New Jack City*. Also, the *Mo' Money* soundtrack is at

least equal to *Boomerang*. LAMAR BUYCKS, LANSING, MI

ing, but it's not helping the future of this nation's young, impressionable people. It's one thing to

have a column like Stix & Stönz, but don't act as if you care about the educational status of the

country by printing an article like "Old School, New Lessons." You're a respectable magazine. Decide

if you'd rather be down with slang or support youth education. You can't do both.

CANDICE SPRICIGO, CRANFORD, NJ

Editor's note: Why must we choose between creative

use of the written word and education? Zora Neale

Hurston didn't; neither does William Burroughs. The

best literature invests language with new life, sometimes

by bending conventions of spelling and punctuation.

And if Bönz's "toasted English" encourages

a few more kids to read, isn't that education too?

C O R R E C T I O N S

• In our October issue, the caption accompanying the last Shabba Ranks photograph should have quoted Shabba as saying, "I have not changed my citizenship."

• In the same issue, the painting by Phene Two on the first page of "Aeroed Armageddon" was printed upside down. Also, check out Phase Two's original aerosol publication, *The International Get My Times* (P.O. Box 299, Prince Street Station, New York, N.Y. 10012; \$20 U.S. subscription, \$25 foreign).

• Also in October, the in the Mix Howard Scott and Flavor Flav photograph was taken by David Attie, and the Jada Pinkett picture by Lisa Terry.

• In November's "Urban Eskimo" fashion story, the hair extensions were by André Davis.

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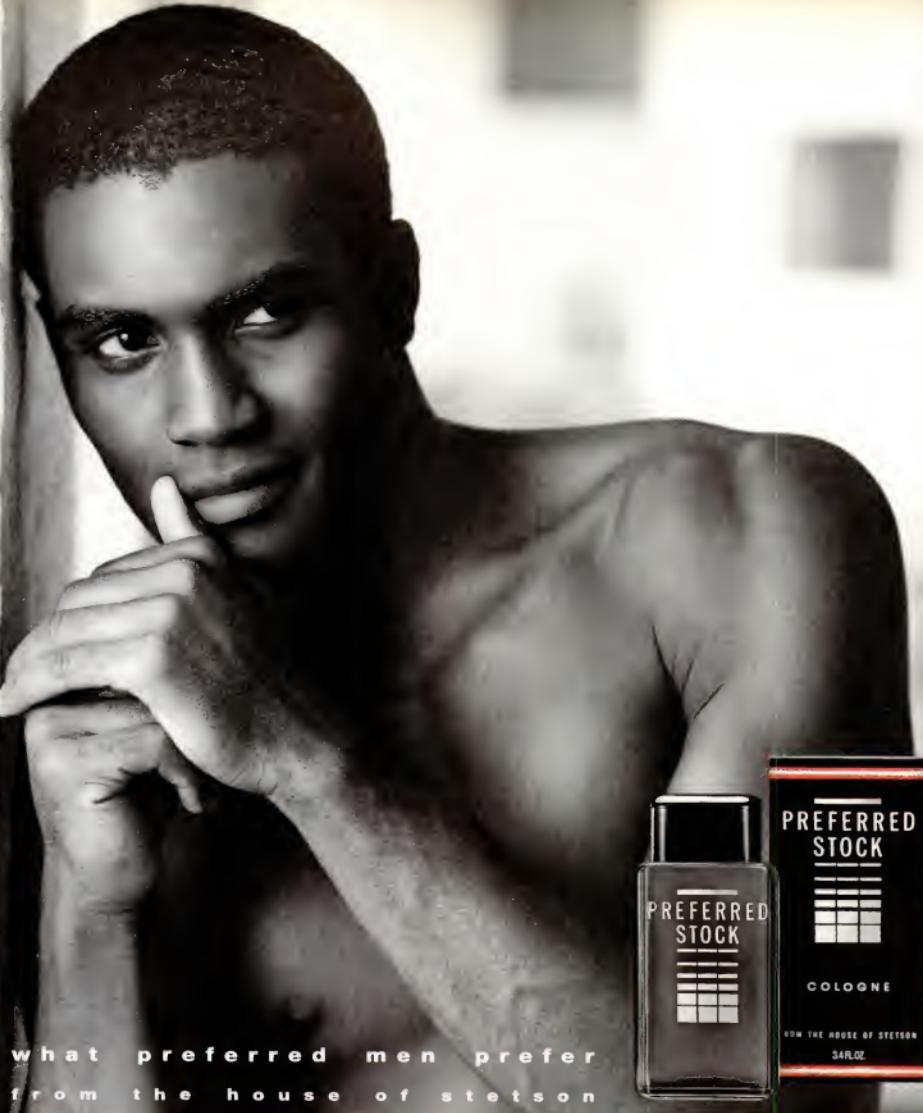
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A Doug McHenry Film

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change the game™

START

Edited by Cory Johnson

Representin' History

by Michael Eric Dyson

If the 15-year evolution of recorded hip hop teaches us anything, it's that history is made in unexpected ways by unexpected people with unexpected results. Rap is now safe from the peril of quick extinction predicted at its humble start. But its cesarean birth in the bitter belly of the '70s proved to be a Rosetta stone of black popular culture.

Afros, platforms, blunts, funk music, and camel eruptions comprise the "back in the day" view of the '70s. But that's just hip hop aesthetics. In reality, the '70s were a severe decade that busted the '60s economic boom. The fallout was felt in restructured automobile industries and collapsed steel mills. It was extended in employment exported to foreign markets. Closer to home, there was the depletion of social services intend-

ed to reverse the material ruin of black life. Later, public spaces designated for black recreation were gutted by Reaganomics or violently transformed by lethal drug economies.

Hip hop was born in these bleak conditions. Hip hopers joined pleasure and rage while turning the details of their difficult lives into craft and capital. This is the world hip hop would come to "represent"—privileged persons speaking for less visible or vocal peers. At their best, rappers shape the tortuous twists of urban fate into lyrical elegies. They represent lives swallowed by too little love or opportunity. They represent with eggarndizing anthems that boast of their ingenuity and luck in surviving. They represent the experience of survivors telling the stories of the afflicted. Even rap's

largest controversies are about representin': Hip hop continually reveals naked malevolence toward women and gays. But the sharp responses to rap's misogyny and homophobia signify its importance in battles over the cultural representation of beleaguered groups.

As rap expands its vision and influence, its unforgivable origins and its relentless quest to represent black youth should both console and challenge hip hoppers. History is not merely the stuff of imperial dreams from above. It isn't just the sanitizing myths written by the few who wield political power. Representin' history is within reach of those who seize the opportunity to speak for themselves, those who truly represent their own interests at all costs. The future of our times is being shaped now. History is today. You represent history.

START



FILA

Sneaker-industry little guys Fila had a problem. They were set to sign former Cal superstar point guard Jason Kidd to a multimillion-dollar deal. They had it all planned, a whole new line of Kidd stuff: shoes, apparel, God knows what else. Only problem: They decided at the last minute that they didn't like Kidd.

"We felt that Jason, with his name and the fact that he was a sophomore, had our target consumer captured," says Pete Davis, Fila's western sales director. They prepped for Kidd's pre-draft visit to their Maryland headquarters by decorating the corporate offices in his honor. "There was obviously a strong amount of interest," says Kidd's agent, Bill Duffy. "In every hallway there were FILA WELCOMES JASON KIDD banners. People had on WE WANT THE KIDD T-shirts. They put on a good display."

But according to Fila execs, Kidd bummed his interview. "He'd been flying all day," says Duffy. "He was probably tired." Fila was not impressed, and got colder feet still when Kidd was involved in a car accident nine days later and was cited for leaving the scene. On September 23, he was fined \$1,000 and sentenced to two years' probation for a hit-and-run misdemeanor. The same day as the accident, the pitiful Dallas Mavericks landed the second pick in the draft, where Fila had predicted Kidd would be taken. With Jamal Mashburn—Fila's 1993 \$7.5 million poster boy—already playing for the Mavs and negative publicity jumping on Kidd like Dennis Rodman on rebounds, Fila decided to go hard after Duke swingman Grant Hill, who was signed by the Detroit Pistons.

Hill had visited Nike—which boasts 15 NBA players as spokesmen, compared with Fila's one—but was disappointed with plans to make him a low-profile part of their stable rather than an heir to His Airmess. So when Fila called with a five-year, multimillion-dollar contract and guaranteed exposure, Hill signed on. "Grant's track record is excellent," says Davis. "He's one of the few athletes coming out of college with his head screwed on straight." And Kidd, well, he signed with Nike. *Josh Tyrangle*

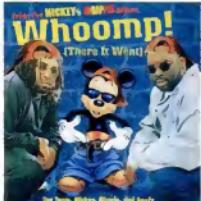


PRIVATE PARTS

Thanks for the hundreds, no, millions of entries we received for the Michael Jackson/Lisa Marie Presley caption contest. After much deliberation, VIBE's editors selected the following contribution from Shawniqa Chanel Johnson, 21, of Memphis. She will receive a fly VIBE T-shirt and CD holder for her way witty caption: "Like, oh my God, Michael, now everybody thinks you're Howard Stern!"

PROOF THAT THE END OF HIP HOP IS NEAR

The mid-September release of *Mickey's Unrapped*, featuring last year's sensation, Tag Team, of "Whoomp! (There It Is)" fame, provided unimpeachable evidence that Disney is the evil empire.



IT AIN'T ME

The "Tupac defense" for cop killing has been invoked again: Ronald Ray Howard used a Tupac-made-me-do-it argument in June 1993 when he shot a Texas state trooper. The jury didn't buy it. Howard was found guilty of murder and sentenced to death.

And on September 7, one of the two 17-year-old teens

who allegedly murdered Milwaukee police officer William Robertson similarly claimed to have been inspired by the "Droppin' the cop" lyrics in Tupac

Shakur's "Soulia's Story." Tupac, meanwhile, continues to have his own problems: In Milwaukee, just four days before the cop shooting, his performance at the MECCA Center激发了一次骚乱 after he insulted the audience and a member of his entourage reportedly flashed a gun. And the rapper's crew is now more dangerous than ever—he's currently filming *Bullet* with actor/boxer Mickey Rourke.

RUFUS & TYRONE by Otis Brayboy II



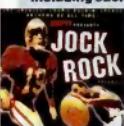
BULLETS

LIFE IMITATES ART Oakland rapper Pooh-Man has always described his music as reality rap. In July, when he allegedly pulled a gun and robbed a Berkeley, Calif. Walgreen's, reality may have caught up with him. Pooh (who

played the drug dealer Doc in *Menace II Society*) now faces six felony charges. The robbery preceded the release of his fourth album, *Ain't No Love*, which includes the song "Letters From the Pen," with lyrics like "They sentenced me to

35 / I'm 23 now so that's my whole damn life." Pooh, 23, could now face 17 years in the joint. "I guess I jinxed myself," he told *VIBE* from the Alameda County Jail. "I thought in my mind it was going to happen, but I couldn't walk away. I guess I needed a wake-up call, and unfortunately I got it."

ROCKED! Tommy Boy has just released *Jock Rock*, a collection of classic rock songs played over and over (and over) at sporting events—including such standards as "Shout," "I Got You (I Feel Good)," and "Dance to the Music"—and crowd pleasers like wild applause, organ riffs, and the last few bars of "The Star-Spangled Banner." If this all



sounds familiar, that's because the album was inspired by a story in *VIBE*'s February 1994 issue. Whoever said "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery" never heard of residual checks.

STAMP ACT According to Nat "King" Cole's widow, Maria Cole, the U.S. Postal Service screwed up the famed crooner's birth date (she says it's March 17, 1919, not March 17, 1917) when they put his face on 36 million new 29-cent stamps in September. The



Postal Service has also come under fire for trying to clean up the image of blues founding father Robert Johnson, who died of poison at age 27 in 1938. On the stamp, issued September 1, Johnson is depicted as being clean-cut and is not smoking—which is sort of like depicting Flavor Flav without his gold teeth.

Joseph V. Tirella,
Billy Jam, and Max Ernst

RADIO DAZE

Attention, "quota blacks" and "liberal egg-sucking dogs": The black Rush Limbaughs of the world have got the mike

There's no such thing as black culture or a hip hop culture. That's nothing but separatism! With a polite southern smile and preppy red suspenders, Armstrong Williams delivers the rhetoric that's made him one of America's hottest talk radio stars. On his Washington, D.C.-based show, aired on 30 stations nationwide, Williams joins callers in praise of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas and deftly fends off angry calls from liberal African-Americans. "Nature does not support this thing that blacks are totally separate and have a culture of their own," he insists. "We are different because we chose to be different."

Williams is part of a new army of conservative African-American talk show hosts taking the nation's airwaves by storm. Boston-based Earl Jackson's blustery syndicated show, broadcast five days a week, warns its audience against a familiar litany of so-called evils: gun control, healthcare reform, Bill Clinton, Louis Farrakhan, immigrants, and gays. One time Maryland Republican senatorial candidate Alan Keyes airs nationally out of Baltimore. And Denver's tough-talking Ken Hamblin—dubbed "the black Rush Limbaugh" by CBS News—took his show nationwide this fall, referring to his city's small black community as "Darktown," populated by "poverty pimps," "quota blacks," and "liberal egg-sucking dogs."

The audience for this brand of talk radio is 88 percent white, according to a 1993 *Times Mirror* study. But the hosts maintain that they speak for a growing "silent majority" of African-Americans, a black conservative movement finally gaining momentum.

Jim Winston, executive director of the National Association of Black Owned Broadcasters, sees no such movement—and no surge in any kind of black radio programming. "It really comes down to the same old issue," he says. "He who controls the medium controls the message." Indeed, of the roughly 10,000 radio stations operating in America, exactly 180 are black-owned. And of the approximately 4,000 talk radio hosts at mainstream stations, fewer than 30 are black.

Meanwhile, not one mainstream or liberal black host is in syndication, so conservatives continue to get the last word. "Black Americans are tired," says Armstrong Williams. "People are frustrated; they're angry. They realize this [conservative] message deserves a chance. I'm only telling them what I believe. I'm not a pawn of anybody." Williams insists his neighbors will soon see the light: "No matter how vehemently many blacks oppose black conservatives, deep down they want to embrace the message."

Eric Boehlert



START HO-HO NO MO'

After 1994's hip hop holiday, Christmas will never be the same

Nico's Talking Rap Shades (\$6.99) are "the sunglasses with rap music and real cool talk!" As if the blinding red light and the Grandmaster Flash old-school flavas weren't enough, buttons on the top release a hideously unfunny g groove. Another button delivers messages like "It's live jiva" and "Rap me, baby, I'm a real cool cat!"

Yikas! Treeds pencils come in a package featuring a dreadlocked cartoon and ever-so-catchy rhymes like "Bust a move with a serious groove!" and "Hit these chrome-boys like a gun and start out on a slammin' color party going down."



The Clinton crime bill didn't even mention squirt guns. So let Junior jump to HT Toys' AK-47 Water Rifle with "super action" (\$2.99). Pretested. And how.



Comes DJs will vibe on the Solid Gold Rock Star Sound Machine (\$32.99), just like a miniature late-'80s Radio Shack mixing board, with jumbo cross faders and almost-easy-to-use controls. The set includes a detectable microphone for shout-outs and handy "special effect" sounds, like "machine gun," "star war," and "red-alert siren."



Playskool (from the old school?) comes strong with the rugged Little Drummer electronic drum machine with Rap-A-Long Microphone (\$29.99). "Takes a knockin' and keeps on rockin'."

TALKING BEEPER

TRY ME

200 BEEPER

The 200 Toy Talking Beeper (\$4.99) comes with real paging sounds, a blinking light, and a cute little kid's voice: "You are being paged. 'Cause you're never too young to be hard."

Li'l Playmates Boom Box by Unimax (\$11.99) has rotating speakers and extra-tall jumbo controls, and comes with a standee like "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" and "Little Brown Jug."

SUPER SPRAY CHALK

FAST DRYING CHALK WASHES AWAY!

TRY ME

BOOM BOX

Barbie

Star Rapper

You can tag, bomb, and piece to your heart's content with Super Spray Chalk from Cedco (\$9.99). The only catch is that spray chalk is designed to wash off with water. Promoted with pictures of tykes gettin' up in the streets, free from fear of the vandal squad.

PLAYSKOOL
ELECTRONICS

Little Drummer

Electronic Drum Machine with Rap-A-Long Microphone

3 Years and Older

Rappin' Rockin'

3 Years and Older

From Mattel comes Rappin' Rockin' Barbie and her crew (\$21.99 apiece). Each comes with a "real rap beat boom box," blaster, a mean rhythm track with a "rap beat bass line," and Barbie raps, "Yo! Come on, guys, end all you iify girls too! Rap 'n' rhyme 'cause now it's time to show what you can do!"

Christina Verán and Daron Murphy

The clarity of Kenwood's car audio system may attract a whole new breed of fans.



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START IN THE MIX



HEY HONEY! 1. Craig Mack and Biz Markie? My, my, there's so much charm in the room. Can you feel it? 2. Branford Marsalis, at his listening party for *Buckshot LeFonque*, is trying to be slightly taller than actor Laurence Fishburne. Or else he's wearing heels. 3. But not even poet Maya Angelou, who hosted the event, can decipher the album's title. 4. At Summer Jams in Los Angeles, Raphael Wiggins (of Tony Toni Toné) does his '90s tribute to *I Dream of Jeannie*, but ain't no one *hair* master. 5. Backstage at the show, Jeru the Damaja gives new meaning to his name. 6. *Hold up!* Who told you that *I was gonna work on your next album?* Pete Rock has a close encounter of the Fat Joe kind. 7. *Vogue* creative director André Leon Talley and Russell Simmons at a Donna Karan fashion show. 8. Snoop wears a Mary J.-Blige-circa-1992 hairstyle at the MTV Video Music Awards. 9. MTV VJ Kennedy just can't get enough. First she simulates oral sex on her microphone while standing next to unsuspecting N.Y.C. mayor Rudolph Giuliani. Then she lets Bill Bellamy grab her titties. What's next? The Republican Party? 10. Salt, Spinarella, and Pepa shoop, stoop, and drop as Salt drops their choreography award backstage. 11. Ill and Al Scratches do a few push-ups before a performance at New York's Tunnel. 12. PMD (Parish Smith, formerly of EPM) unknowingly shares cake with his man, DJ Scratch. 13. Everyone is hooping it up at the 1994 New York Wheelchair All-Star Classic after-party, including Michael Jordan's pal Adolph Shriver, the New York Knicks' John Starks and Charles Oakley, Hair Club for Men wet dream Kid, the Indiana Pacers' Mark Jackson, and an unidentified woman. 14. George Clinton and Louie "Babbilin" Kabbabie, the P-Funk rapper, at Lollapalooza in Minneapolis. Believe it or not, this man gets the crowd all open. 15. Just like his father, Lew, before him, *The Wonder Years'* Fred Savage celebrates his 18th birthday at a James Brown concert at L.A.'s Greek Theater. 16. Glen Rice and Muggsy Bogues get whupped by Bobby Javid and Sean Farber at the 1994 Blockbuster Video World Game Championship in Fort Lauderdale. 17. It's the Notorious B.I.G. sporting some mackadocious flavor at Coolio's birthday party. *And that ain't all....*

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START IN THE MIX TOO



OH, NOT AGAIN! **1.** At James Brown's Augusta, Ga., birthday party, CeCe Peniston disses Tone-Loc by telling him he smells like a funky cold medina. Not only does YTN-Vee require a mandatory cut-up stomach, you also have to accessorize like Treach. **4.** Brownstone sure can sing, but why do they have to eat their mixes after every performance? Is that the new horrorcore? **5.** Vicious, aren't you a little too young to be having such a grown-up dancer? You go, boy! **6.** At Las Vegas' first crapshoot at rap music awards, old-schooler Busy Bee and the Lady of Rage demonstrate the importance of sunglasses to wannabe celebs. **7.** Eazy-E poses strong and tough with Public Enemy's Chuck D. But **(8)**, he has to bend down a little with Queen Latifah (stooped at the waist), lest he be confused with Vicious. **9.** **9.** It's new protege, with the Beastie Boys' MCA and poet Shá-ke at Rosie Perez's birthday party. **10.** Don King stumping for his man at Brooklyn's West Indian Day parade. **11.** *Why do I wear sunglasses indoors?* Well, you see, Busy Bee and Rage say... Designer Karl Kani demonstrates true celeb style, signing posters at Macy's in Manhattan. **12.** DJ Premier has a brand-new gold-fronts vampire look for hip hop Dracula fans everywhere. **13.** *No, really. It's just soda, I swear.* Gerald "Casanova" Leverett enjoys his drink at New York's former Honeysuckle West. **14.** *Is that a nut or what?* Squirmel Man, er, Method Man explains why he's in a tree: "My style is like a monkey's because my rhymes are so flexible." Uh... okay. **15.** Flavor Flav at a Goods for Guns charity basketball game, with his friend and inspiration Buckwheat. **16.** No, no. Buckwheat's on the T-shirt in the last photo. This is actually Coolio (looking like he just came back from a fantastic voyage). **17.** Model Iman signs autographs at a showcase of her new makeup line at JC Penney in Detroit's Northland Shopping Mall. See, those supermodels are humanoids after all.

Mimi Valdés



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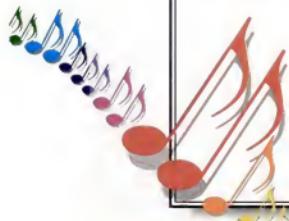
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START STIX & STÖNZ

A man can do almost anything on a full stomach. And boy, am I hungry. I've saved this slice of cheese since yesterday. I'ma put it with the macaroni that I have at home. I got it right here in my pocket. It might not be good, but it should be the light. Damn! It melted! Gotta make something else. Time for a new recipe.

Let's see, what are we gonna make tonight, Dee? It's got to be something thick yet quick, to feed a starving artist. We always cook from scratch. We've made gunbo and did the cash-a-roll dish. We've sold soul food dinners and gray lemonade to make ends meet. Don't really know what to put into the soup this time, but whatever it is, it gotta have hot sauce! Anything we make adds flavor to our story. What do you think, Don'ty?

"I think the best meals are the ones you make yourself!"

Right, and we've been makin' steam for months. You're a chef and an illustrator; I'm a cook and writer. We both love food, plus we both know what the starving artist goes through. There's been nights that we ain't have nuffin' in the house to eat except beans—but we got by. We always been able to whip up something from l'il or nothing. That's why we called this one "Food for Thought," 'cause both our jobs depend on flavor.

The recipe for Stix & Stönz is simple—me and Dee make a crew. I write the songs, and he cooks the cartoon. Together we make a meal—that's our deal. Take it from a couple of breadwinners....

Yo, Don'ty. What's for dinner?

"What do you like? Lima beans, rice, fried chicken, macaroni and cheese, collard greens, stuffed peppers, pig feet, or shark? I can draw anything."

Shark? Where'd you get the imagination to cook up shit like that?

"My family is from Charleston, S.C. You know—straight-up home cookin'. Imagination is tradition in our house. I have trust in my skill no matter what I'm thinking about. It's just like a recipe in the raw. You could draw what you feel. Like adding buttons to a shirt, it's all about detail. If I'm drawing a girl character, she needs lipstick and earings. When I'm cooking, it has to look sweet or nobody's

gonna come back for seconds."

"We've been cookin' for over 12 years. Who got you started with your first recipe?"

"My grandfather gets down. He put me onto some old family secrets after he saw me watching him and my grandmother create. I just started gettin' into it from there. He put me onto baby shark—shark is the bomb!"

"When is the best time to catch a plate of shark?"

"I find that shark makes a proper breakfast. Shark meat with some grits and biscuits is slammin'. There's a large market for fish down South. Some fry up fish; others make a wish. It's a quick dish."

What about other kinds of foods—can you make, let's

You're right, Dee. A cook can copy a recipe, but only a chef can create its identity. It has to please the eye as well as your appetite. Like an artist, you have to paint a picture of preparation. All day I've been dreaming of shrimp with lobster sauce. Every time I close my eyes, I see a big steaming plate. But the waiter never brings my dream to reality. When I get home, it's strictly self-service. I guess a sardine salad will have to do. That's when you know shit is hitting the fan: when there's nuttin' in the pan and dinner comes from a can! But just when things go from bad to worst, part of the art challenges you to "dream... then do it." And that's what we're doin' right now. What's next, Dee?"

"I put it on paper—write it down, and see if I can add something to it. Just like you. I'd do a sketch so that when I come back to it, all I have to do is add flavor."

I hear you. Whatever makes the milk shake. If you ain't got the main ingredient, you've got to improvise.

"I got mad meals; some of them I know by heart. I went to New York Restaurant School. I can cook anything. For mac 'n' cheese, just scramble some eggs mixed with a little milk, salt, and pepper, then add your cheese to the noodles. Most people don't know about that. Our creamy consistency is what brings it to perfection. Let it bake for a few, then... Boom! It's bangin'. That's the best part about cookin'.

in' for a living. If I don't know it by heart, then I'll just use my imagination. If it doesn't come out good the first time, then I'll know my mistakes. Slow cookin' always tastes the best. Try again."

But we always do it. And we never have to eat our words. Spices and herbs provide the necessary flavor. It smells great, but we hate to eat alone, so me and Dee called some friends over for chow. Guess what—looks like another powwow. What's next?

"Put in everything that we talked about; let it come right from the head. Remember, imagination makes food for thought."

Will they buy it?

"It's bought... Dinner is served."

This story is about real life as real people have to live it. Some names, places, and other details have been changed to protect the innocent, the guilty, and the rest of us.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT BY BÖNZ MALONE

YOU'VE JUST BEEN DEALT A KILLER HAND.



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START YOUNG WORLD

Back when I was a shorty going to P.S. 456, I used to zone out and run away with my imagination. My teachers didn't understand how I could just tune them out and jump into my own personal world. But I was still a child; I thought that I had license to do that type of shit. Little did I realize that my vivid imagination would alter the course of my life forever....

Bright 'n' early one morning, Momdukes sent me to the bodega with the last \$5 food stamp to get some grits for breakfast. As I left, she straight out, "Come right back home." I knew she was serious—times were hard, money was tight, and Moms was rockin' her "redman jones"—but as I opened the front door and embraced the morning sun and the sweet-smelling ghetto funk, everything she'd dreamed in a year flew out the other.

I opted for the shortcut through the skoolyard jungle gym. Then I dipped around the corner to Mr. Fisher's candy store for a peek at the new comic books. One minute turned into five as my mind ran wild with Stan Lee; my perception of Bed-Stuy transformed it into the Marvel universe.

Bah! *Kill smash puny human and the car he drives!* Meanwhile, Dr. Strange opens the door to the Negative Zone as Mr. Fantastic stretches his arms to grab the canister of atomic grits. Safe and secure, our hero places the alien canister of grits upon the lab counter, and dips into his pocket to reveal—Oh shit! Reality check! Where da hell is dat loot at? Stop the world! I LOST IT!

Looking and feeling stupid, I knew I'd face a bona fide ass whuppin' at home. Lump in my throat 'cause I couldn't think of a lie—and catching flashbacks of Uncle Rob's leather garrison belt—I just flipped and said, Fuck it! I ain't going home, I'm going all out! Fuck imagination—I'm running away for real!

I left my momma crying to keep her from making me cry. I blew the scene like a wild dandelion, drifting aimlessly (and naively) through the big city. I found my way from the playground to the subway, to Coney Island, to stolen cotton candy on the Boardwalk, to the precinct, to the cop car, and back home to an ass whuppin'. Moms whipped my ass good too. But I didn't care as long as I could go my way.

People were always tellin' me no, but nobody ever took the time to help me understand why. Did they have my best interests at heart? How should I know? If you tell me no, I want to know, Why can't it be yes? The only thing that I did know was I was tired of grown folks fucking with me! I was a man-child with nothing promised to me, and I wanted to be free. The only thing that scared me was them jail movies, but I thought I was too young for that.

I boldly flaunted my sense of manhood, holding my ding-a-ling in attempts to piss on anybody acting aggressive in my path. I was answered with a police escort to the Bureau of Child Welfare—and unknowingly injected into the foster care system. They assigned me to a social

worker (some geeky broad asking stupid questions) and brought me to a room with a big color TV, coloring books, snacks, and all the other shit that's supposed to make a child happy. Kids was having fun—making noise and being rambunctious. The social worker told me to wait until she could find me a foster home. Fuck da foster home, I thought. Old folks probably there. I wanna stay here with the posse.

At first, I just watched the big boys bug out. But when I joined in, it seemed like the shit hit the fan. A counselor started calling names, and one by one, my associates started leaving. Being new, I didn't understand what was going on. I asked where they were going. The one everybody called Big Babypaw turned to me and said, "Yo, Shorty, we going ta da group home."

what he was drawing. He noticed me, smiled, and said, "What up, Shorty? What you eyeballing?"

"I wanted to see what ya doing, dat all."

"Word?" he said, as he held the paper up to reveal a fresh-ass graffiti character standing next to the name Sha-Born.

"Who's Sha-Born?" I asked, not really expecting an answer.

"Sha? That's my brother. They just sent him to a different group home."

"Word? It's more than one?" I asked, amazed, as I grabbed a seat and eagerly listened to Babypaw break down and reformulate my understanding of group homes. "Check it out, they got group homes all over the city—shit, the country, for that matter. Ain't shit but a junior jail.

Some real loose, some real tight, but they all got rules to hold you in check until they can figure out what to do with you."

"What do you mean, 'Do with you'?" I asked, puzzled.

"See, if you're in a group home, you're a ward of the state. After your release, they either let you go back to your family, the street, welfare, jail, or the army. Many group homes are run by religious institutions, others by the state. The majority claim to teach the children to adjust to the realities of life, but you can't teach a child you don't love. The counselors can't relate to the harsh culture these children were raised in and therefore don't give a fuck about their job, much less the children. Their main concern is the coworker they're trying to fuck and that loot-chette at the end of the week. When you go to the group home tonight, Shorty, remember, you on your own."

"Word? This shit is getting real."

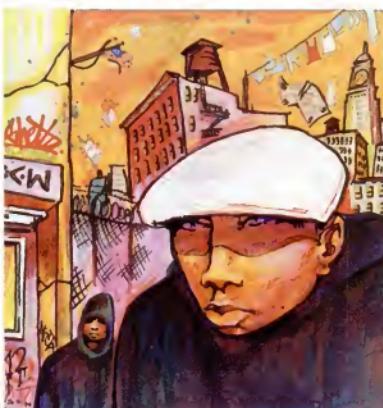
"How old are you?" I asked.

"Twelve," I said proudly.

"Yeah, well, you better be a 12-year-old man, 'cause that's all there is in the boys' home. Born a man, die a man, and we're dropping like flies. When they call your name tonight, remember, even if you're in the middle of the room, your back is still against the wall. Ya dig? In the group home, all you really got is your self-respect and your manhood. They're trying to steal my respect, so I got to fight for my 'hood."

Those were his immortal words. That was then and this is now, but nothing has changed except the intensity of the struggle for survival. As a "juvenile delinquent" (so-called by the state, which also accused my mother of being "unfit"), I gained my education in the halls of these "group homes." During the years I spent in and out, I learned that these institutions were custom-made to detain little so-called badass boys such as myself. But I still haven't learned why us little boys were considered so bad. I guess mischief replaces boredom in the mind of a restless child.

Dedicated to my man Big Babypaw. REST IN PEACE.



Damn, the group home. It seemed like the place to be. But instead, they put me in a foster home—and after five different attempts to turn somebody else's house into my own, I was deemed "unruly" and shuffled back into the bureaucracy for placement in a group home. To me, this shit was one big adventure, waking up to something different damn near every day.

While waiting for my slow-ass social worker to finally get me into the group home, I noticed Big Babypaw. He wore a polyester mockneck, flare-leg Lee jeans (with a sewn-in crease), a Kangol, and Adidas laced up checkerboard style. Last I saw him, he was the wild kid in that joint, but now he was sittin' peacefully at the table in the corner, quietly scribbling something.

I walked over to him curiously and sidled up to see

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YO-X-IT!

BY ROBERT KORNBLAT & KYLE BAKER

This was the fictional X Part 2, a.k.a. Larval Bishop—one year ago, he was the leader of the nonexistent group Rap Bastards. Now he's charged with 43 counts of assault and—not coincidentally—is the head of his own label, Hide Da Ho Records.

Today he is a worried man



X, you're part of a distressing trend: homeboys getting over in the rap business by terror and violence.

Yo, fuck you and your bitches!

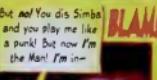
How long have we in the recording industry been covering up your punk behavior? Like when you held our *Fetchit* record executives hostage for two days to get out of your contract!



Antonio, man, you're my brother!

Shouldn't leave your piece where I can find it—and shoulda paid more attention when we was peeing the Lion King!

But no! You dis Simba and you play me like a punk! But now I'm the *Man!* I'm in—



And when you attacked a young rapper for using a studio phone to call his ailing mother... we paid him off and picked up the tab for his mother's AZT!



But when you take on reporters because you look ugly on-camera—



When you forget that *Superman* moonlights as reporter—



Poor X—you'll never get that the real force behind power is always money.



...Sun, Larval...

Your brother's ambitions were too *small-time*—



—and you'll never upgrade your gangsta methods to match the truly brutal level of big business



That bag holds all the bootleg tapes that made your rep—we dug up your driveway.



Fuh—
BLUB
BLUB
BLUB!



So long, X—
you never could listen.

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music pool
94



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NOMINATION BALLOT

RAP/HIP-HOP **A**

1 _____
2 _____
3 _____
4 _____
5 _____
6 _____
7 _____
8 _____
9 _____

R&B/SOUL **B**

1 _____
2 _____
3 _____
4 _____
5 _____
6 _____
7 _____
8 _____
9 _____

CLUB/DANCE **C**

1 _____
2 _____
3 _____

REGGAE/
DANCEHALL **D**

1 _____
2 _____
3 _____

JAZZ **E**

1 _____
2 _____

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vote Up!

how to do it:

Cut out the nomination ballot provided,
write in the name of the person, group, or
song that you feel had the most flavor in
'94 for each category and send it in.

category

rap/hip Hop **A**

- 1 Best Single
- 2 Best Album
- 3 Best Male Artist
- 4 Best Female Artist
- 5 Best Group
- 6 Best Producer
- 7 Best Video
- 8 Sexiest Male Artist
- 9 Sexiest Female Artist



category **B**
R&B/SOUL

- 1 Best Single
- 2 Best Album
- 3 Best Male Artist
- 4 Best Female Artist
- 5 Best Group
- 6 Best Producer
- 7 Best Video
- 8 Sexiest Male Artist
- 9 Sexiest Female Artist



CHECK THE
RESULTS
IN THE
MARCH
ISSUE OF
VIBE
MAGAZINE



category **C**
club/dance

- 1 Best Single
- 2 Best Album
- 3 Best Artist or Group

category **D**
**Reggae/
Dancehall**

- 1 Best Single
- 2 Best Album
- 3 Best Artist or Group

category **E**
jAZZ

- 1 Best Album
- 2 Best Artist or Group

This'll
put
some
jingle
in your
bells.



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ILL AL SKRATCH

A shout-out to the homiez

ON FIRST LISTEN, IT'S HARD TO TELL if "Where My Homiez?" (Come Around My Way)," the first single from Ill Al Skratch, is an invitation, a lament, or a threat. A laid-back slow jam with a vaguely menacing edge, "Homiez" blends suaver-than-thou R&B cool and post-gangsta posturing with delicious ambiguity. Then there's that mournful chorus....

Like all great out-of-left-field debut singles, "Homiez" begs the question: Can they follow it up? For the answer, check out Ill Al Skratch's album, *Creep Wit' Me*. Recorded in slightly more than a month's time, *Creep Wit' Me* is a cornucopia of sweet-'n'-sour hip hop gems.

So what's the scoop on Ill Al Skratch? For starters, they're a duo—one guy's named Ill, the other is Al Skratch—and they're not brothers. (Ill's from Flatbush, Brooklyn, while Al Skratch calls Washington Heights, Manhattan home.) Not unlike siblings who find mutual cooperation more fruitful than rivalry, though, the two exhibit an easy, natural bond.

And like a lot of young kids who think rap is the only music that matters, Ill and Al, both in their early twenties, love to talk about the formative years of hip hop music and culture in New York. Ill recalls how "back in the day, around '84, '85, I'd use an eyebrow pencil to paint on a mustache" in order to get into clubs like the Funhouse. Al talks animatedly about an old-school rap show (featuring Kris-One, Whodini, the Sugarhill Gang, and others) that he's going to catch at Manhattan's Paramount Theater. "I'll be the biggest fan there," he says.

For these two, rapping for a living was always the game plan. Until recently, however, they worked day jobs while pursuing separate musical careers. Ill was a telemarketer and then a stockbroker; Al was a groundskeeper at an East Harlem housing project. Fate thrust them together two years ago when they were in different hip hop groups: Ill with Wise Guyz and Al with the Al-N-Ted Experience. Their respective producers hit on the idea of teaming them up to record a demo of "Creep Wit' Me," a song Ill had been working on. Ill's aggressive, quick-tongued delivery and Al's melodic vocal flow went together like peanut butter and chocolate.

"It sounded real cool," says Ill of the initial recording. "Me and my man Al Skratch came to an agreement that we was gonna stick together no matter what." Adds Al, "It was destined."

The second single from *Creep Wit' Me* is a romantic R&B tune called "I'll Take Her," which features love-man Brian McKnight as guest vocalist. "Since the first single was for the homiez, we thought it only right that the second be something for the honeys," says Ill. "Versatility," Al says. "That's what Ill Al Skratch is all about."

Tom Sinclair

NEXT

People on the verge



NEXT

THE SONGCATCHERS

America the beautiful



SHOSHONE, DWAMISH, LILLOOET, NISQUALLY, EYAK, AFRICAN-AMERICAN, CHINESE-American, Irish-American, and Jewish-American musicians, reporters, and record execs mill about a lavish opium den of a banquet hall perched on the 35th floor of Seattle's Smith Tower. The tribes, surrounded by a 360-degree sunset view, are gathered for a powwow: The SongCatchers are throwing a party to celebrate the release of their debut album.

Right now, Lara Lavi, the SongCatchers' lead singer and driving spirit, is frantic: 20 pounds of Chinese noodles for the party are strewn on the sidewalk below. And more rides on the success of this disc, *Dreaming in Color*, than the usual profit and platinum. These royalties will support workshops where teenagers learn to create and record their own musical compositions, as well as several Alaskan rain-forest conservation organizations.

The group itself, a mix of Native Americans and other transcultural hyphenates, embodies this "multicultural" activism. Their music combines Indian tradition with a boogie-down blend of other American sounds, including jazz, funk, rock, and pop.

One night in 1991, Lavi, a veteran Pacific Northwest rocker (and attorney for the Muckleshoot tribe), invited Arlie Neskaht and Mark Smith of the White Eagle Singers onstage for a

jam with her band, Red Dog Zen. "They started banging on the drum and going, 'Aii-yai,'" Lavi recalls. "Then, one by one, the band joined in until we had this sound. I started singing, just going for it." Saxophonist Charles Neville (of the Neville Brothers) and keyboardist Mark Cadenas (formerly of the Time) became involved, and the SongCatchers were born.

Tonight Neville is busy with his brothers elsewhere, but his high-profile mission to reforge the bonds that historically link Native American and African-American resistance infuses the evening's spirit. At 8:30 p.m., Indian rights activist Billy Frank Jr. takes the stage to bless the SongCatchers. Then the band unleashes "Neon Sky," the album's opening song, which developed from that ecstatic jam three years ago. Jaws drop at the sound of the dense, otherworldly interplay between Lavi's lyrical soprano wail, sax riffs rich in longing, and the blood rush of Native American chanting and drumming. Indians in full regalia perform a grass dance. Feet stomp the floor as if it were the packed soil of ancient lands.

Native Americans don't write songs; they catch them—from a gentle breeze, from the faint sounds of laughter, from other gifts of nature. That same organic rhythm moves the SongCatchers.

Elena Cumano

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B-GIRLS

A new crew of female R&B vocalists with '70s flavor and a '90s twist



*Mama's shiny purple coat
Giant-sized shoulder bag to tote
Tall, tall shoes and panty hose
Big straw hat with shiny bows
I look pretty
I float
I smile
I pose*
—Eloise Greenfield, "I Look Pretty"

I DON'T CARE IF YOU'RE 15 OR 25. BEING AN R&B GIRL IS ALL ABOUT PLAYING GROWN-UP. AS A CHILD, YOU WERE PLEADING WITH YOUR MAMA TO PAINT YOUR NAILS red and getting dressed up so you could perform love songs in the living room. Your costume was a peach sparkle skirt, a matching leopard, and bare feet. You hustled, bumped, and bus-stopped your way through hits by Peaches & Herb, the Stylistics, and A Taste of Honey.

Today your mama and her friends aren't your only fans. The living room performances have finally paid off: You've got a record deal. Your sisters are For Real and Emége. Your cousins are hip hop soul queens Mary J. Blige, SWV, and Jade, and "alternative rockers" Me'Shell NdegéOcello and Dionne Farris. And your mentors are none other than Minnie Riperton, Whitney Houston, and Anita Baker.

You are a young flower, of course, and they are all womenfolk. Although you know how to walk the walk and sing the song, you don't really know how it felt when Jennifer Holliday belted "And I Am Telling You I'm Not Going" in *Dreamgirls*. One day, however, you will. You've got the melody, the harmony, and a whole lot of soul.

Rising R&B stars Billy Lawrence, Brigitte McVilliams, Brandy, and Brownstone remind us of a time before we became jaded. They are the spirit of the '70s and of the early '80s—back when we were naive enough to actually believe in affirmative action. They remind us of preteens we used to know, who sang Stacy Lattisaw's "Love on a Two



"Way Street" at the top of their lungs and couldn't understand why on earth their mamas wanted them to "hush!"

Now 15-year-old Brandy Norwood—the voice behind the hit single "I Wanna Be Down," from her debut, *Brandy*—is putting on makeup at a photo shoot while listening to her Walkman and singing out loud. Mimi, Maxee, and Nicci—a.k.a. Brownstone, Michael Jackson's first act on MJ Music/Epic Records—are fixing up too. Their heartfelt debut, *From the Bottom Up*, matches soulful tracks to the a cappella sound that got them signed. Party girl Brigitte McWilliams has grown up and brought such heavy-weights as Jermaine Dupri, Butterfly of Digable Planets, and Domino into the studio to help create her sultry *Take Advantage of Me*. Billy Lawrence's first album, *One Night Stay*, is a gentle, sexy blend of angelic highs and rocking lows.

One at a time, these sisters are a glam Jada Pinkett character. Collectively, they are Sparkle's "Sister & the Sisters," sans fiery red gowns. They've got "it," yet they're unassumingly uneasy, even. Recording in the studio is safe, they say; the prospect of performing live sends them on a completely different trip. Instead of doing their thing in Mama's living room, and in place of getting down in Sparkle's ghetto pubs, they'll be appearing in concert halls and on TV—the Box, BET, MTV. They're sisters with butterflies. They are half woman and half child. They are R&B girls!

/peleng Kgositise

From left: **Billy Lawrence**; **Brigitte McWilliams**; **Brandy**, **Brownstone's Mimi, Nicci, Maxee**

KRISTINE W

The disco queen rules

KRISTINE W HAS AN INSATIABLE appetite for glitter and melodrama. The imposing, six-foot hulk of a woman—who recently topped dance charts worldwide with the deep house anthem "Feel What You Want"—refuses to simply take the stage and sing. "Honey, I need sequins!" she says. "I need bright colors! I need to give a show that is larger than life. Otherwise, we all might as well just stay home and watch television."

That attitude was the chariot that carried her from a childhood of Pacific Northwest simplicity to the ultimate land of fantasy, Las Vegas, where she still slinks through lounges, warbling Donna Summer medleys with a troupe of drag queens. It was during one particularly spirited show that she caught the attention of Mel Medaille, an A&R executive from England's independent Champion Records. "He was in town for a Lennox Lewis boxing match. Talk about luck," she says, laughing. "He came up to me after the show and said, 'If we can capture that energy on tape, you're going to be a major star.'"

Kristine's musical fairy tale accelerated to Cinderella proportions when she made a quickie trip to the U.K. for a speculative collaboration with revered dance music producers Rollo and Rob D. That stint resulted in a mammoth 10-song recording session, including "Feel What You Want."

Tastemaking DJs in Europe dubbed the track an instant classic and helped start a bidding war among U.S. record labels (EastWest came out on top). Kristine's follow-up single, "One More Try," is about to drop, and a debut album will be released in January. "This is like a dream come true," gushes Kristine—who is actually following in the pump prints of her mother, a jazz singer. "From the first time I saw my mother onstage, looking all glamorous and gorgeous with her makeup and wigs, I knew what my destiny was."

The destiny started taking shape when Kristine hit the beauty pageant circuit as an adolescent. "I learned the power of knowing how to give runway action at an early age," says the former Miss Washington, noting that she won more times than not. "I don't want to brag, but I've got the heel-pivot-hip-swing of life. Only the best drag queens can take me on."

Which, indeed, has lead to (totally unfounded) rumors in the club underground about Kristine's gender. She proudly declares her womanhood, though she admits she loves the attention. Kristine handles the transsexual/drag gossip with a sense of humor. "During a gig at the Roxy in New York, people were feeling my crotch like I tucked something away in there," she says. "Sometimes I even wonder."

Larry Flick

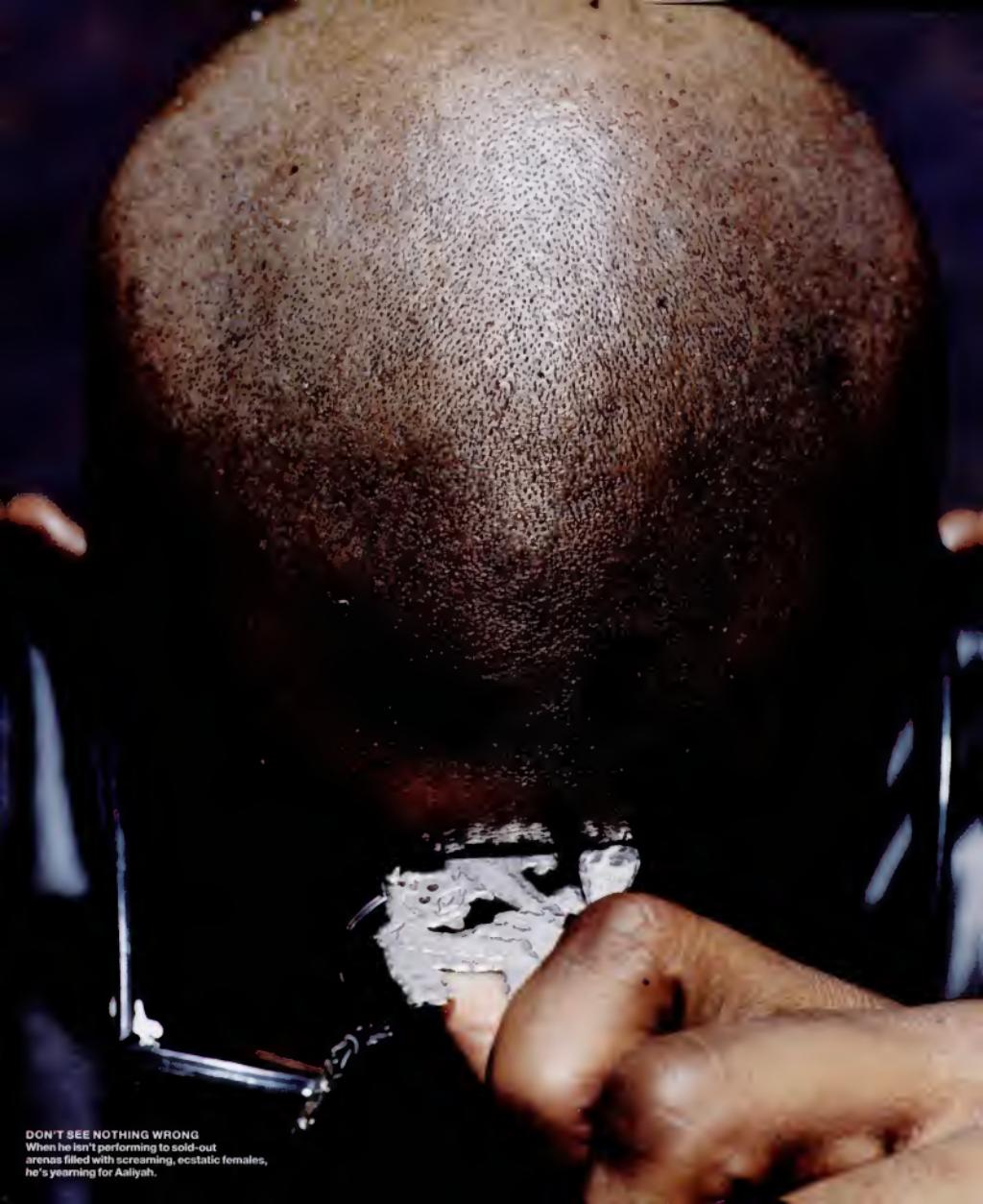
NEXT



"Mr. Jenkins finds the nightclub a welcome change from the country club. And when shaking his groove thing, he sips refreshing T&Ts."



How refreshingly distinctive.



DON'T SEE NOTHING WRONG
When he isn't performing to sold-out arenas filled with screaming, ecstatic females, he's yearning for Aaliyah.

R. Kelly's sweet, aching voice, raunchy lyrics, and bump 'n' grind delivery carried him from Chicago street corners to triple-platinum record sales. Now, amid troubling allegations that he has secretly married his 15-year-old protégée, Aaliyah, Danyel Smith asks, Is he the R&B Man of the Year or just a...

I don't even know why I'm going to the show," says DeeDee. She's sitting in Splinters, in the Gallery Mall in Philadelphia, gettin' the 'do done. The hair on the back of her head is being tapered close to her scalp with electric clippers. The Braxton-esque crown is blow-dried straight and bumped under softly. "I can't believe R. Kelly got married to that child."

"But then I heard she ain't no child"—this from another chair, where someone's getting finger waves.

Then the girl with the electric clippers speaks. She talks out of the side of her mouth as she folds back DeeDee's ear. "I heard she is. And that niggah—now she looks up—needs more than any 15-year-old can give him."

The sprawling Gallery Mall—like the depressed, faded Philadelphia neighborhood it's nestled in—was probably real fly about 15 years ago. Now only the most stalwart of chains—the Gap, Foot Locker, the Limited—remain. Stores stand empty; nowhere is there that mall bustle, except at the Hair Cuttery and at Splinters, and that's because it's Friday and sisters are getting ready for the weekend. They're discussing R. Kelly because he's headlining at the Spectrum tonight and because, word is, he just married his teenage protégée, Aaliyah.

Like the jocks on the radio in New York, Philly, Oakland, and L.A., folks are hammering about Kelly's marriage, making comparisons to Marvin Gaye and Jerry Lee Lewis, joking about jailbait and robbing the cradle.

After arrangements were made for an exclusive interview with VIBE, R. Kelly pulled out at the 11th hour—on the advice of his lawyers. At press time, it was chaos within the Kelly camp, with no spokesperson for Kelly or Aaliyah (both are managed by Aaliyah's uncle, Barry Hankerson) commenting on the marriage or on her alleged pregnancy. The various rumors were helped along by everyone from MTV News to *USA Today*. But no one can answer the question *Right On!* posed months ago: "R. Kelly and Aaliyah: Are They Just Friends?"

The distilled hearsay goes something like this: First everybody thought Aaliyah and R. Kelly were so much in love that when he went on tour, they missed each other terribly. So he supposedly sent his bodyguards to Detroit to get her and bring her to Florida, where he was on a tour date. Then, supposedly, she traveled with him to Chicago, got a phony ID, and married him in a hotel room. Aaliyah's parents were supposedly flipping, and her father supposedly wanted to put Kelly in jail. Supposedly the father went and got his daughter from Chicago, and forbade her to see him and vice versa. But, supposedly, that didn't stop R. Kelly from calling Aaliyah and—when her dad answered—from supposedly saying, *Put my wife on the phone*. Instead, Aaliyah's father put her on a plane to Europe, then Japan, where she's supposed to tour for several months.

Then there's the story that says Aaliyah is supposedly 19, and none of this is as scandalous as folks would like to make it. There is, after all, an Illinois marriage license dated August 31 for Robert S. Kelly and Aaliyah D. Haughton, which lists their respective ages as 27 and 18. (Of course, the marriage would be null and void if the ages are not legit.) The only problem is, while promoting her million-selling *Five* Records debut, *Age Ain't Nothin' but a Number*, Aaliyah has been evasive about stating her age. Her official bio says 15, and a record company publicist has said, "We stand behind the bio." Obviously, performers have been lying about their ages since the dawn of time. But that's show business: smoke

and mirrors, mikes and sound checks. Marriage, however, is something else, and if Aaliyah and R. Kelly's is real, then her pseudo-Lolita image becomes reality. And R. Kelly's sex-man image gets that much murkier.

What the fuck kind of dressing room is this?" says Scoop, one of Coolio's boys. We're deep in the bowels of Philadelphia's Spectrum—it's the Budweiser Superfest's Philly stop. Coolio has just come onstage. Next up is Warren G, and then Heavy D & the Boyz—who are now girlz. R. Kelly tops the bill, and Aaliyah was supposed to be here too. She was dropped because the sponsor thought she was too young to represent a beer company.

Coolio and I are sitting in a hallway on aluminum equipment cases. As he languidly nurses a bunned Newport, pipe cleaner dries limp with postset sweat, we talk about Los Angeles and Lakeside, the Chi-Lites and Billy Paul. Shaquille O'Neal passes by with an ALL ACCESS sticker pasted onto his jacket, and Coolio barely looks up. "He's all right with me," he says of Shaq, "as long as he stays on the court. He can't rap."

Coolio says everybody on the Superfest is cool with each other, but that none of the crews really hang. They do play pickup hoop games together during downtime, under the big portable NBA hoop and backboard that travels with the tour. It belongs to R. Kelly, who hates to miss a day on the court.

But the conversation with Coolio has to wait, because Scoop has a serious problem with the dressing room.

"This is luxury compared with what we usually have," says Coolio resignedly, barely glancing into the musty five-by-eight-foot room with a toilet and a mirror.

"Have you seen R. Kelly's shirt?" Scoop wants to know. "It's big. Wall-to-wall carpet, big-ass color TV, food..." He rolls his eyes, pissed.

Coolio gives Scoop a buddy-to-buddy, get-out-my-mix-for-a-minute look, and then picks up where we left off. "R&B today is repetitious," he says. "Everybody bites everybody else. Everything sounds like everything else."

"Like R. Kelly sounds like Aaron Hall?"

"Yeah," Coolio says, eyelids low, legs stretched in front of him—too chill, really, to be described. "Kelly, bit Hall, Hall bit Charlie from the Gap Band, Charlie bit whoever he bit."

I ask him whether he likes R. Kelly, his music.

"I checks," says Coolio, after a slo-mo exhale, "for dat niggah on the court."

Robert Kelly grew up on Chicago's infamous South Side. He loved basketball as a kid, rarely thinking about music, except when he sang in church. "My goal," he has said, "was to be the next Michael Jordan." That was cool, but R. Kelly's mom, Joann Kelly, made sure her kids knew life wasn't all playtime, especially after Robert, age 13, was shot in the shoulder as someone tried to steal his bike. (He still carries the bullet.) All four Kelly children took the academic tests necessary for admission to Kenwood Academy, a prestigious, multicultural public school in Hyde Park. They all got in.

When Kelly first came to Kenwood—the school that gave us talents as disparate as Chaka Khan and Da Brat—could he play a note. At the suggestion of music department head Lena McLin (Kelly would come to call her his second mother; he lost his own to cancer in 1993), he appeared in a high school talent show. He sang Stevie

Photographs by Dan Laxenberg

Wonder's "Ribbon in the Sky" and, according to McLin, "brought the house down." Kelly has said he laughed at her when she asked him to sing. "But when I sang, people paid attention. I felt a sense of power, sort of like when Spider-Man got bit."

Now retired after a 36-year career, McLin teaches privately from her Chicago home. From her tone, it's easy to tell she loves and respects Kelly. "He was a fine student. Music history, theory, piano, choir, opera workshop, jazz workshop—Robert took it all. He wrote some gorgeous music. These are things he's not singing now."

No. Now he's singing songs like "I Like the Crotch on You," or the platinum single "Bump 'n' Grind." That song was the top pop single for three weeks and No. 1 R&B single for 12 consecutive weeks—reigning longer than any song since 1958. The album it springs from, *12 Play*, stayed in the pop Top 10 for 20 consecutive weeks, held the No. 1 R&B album spot for nine weeks, and will reach quadruple platinum soon. Two other singles from the album, the limp "Sex Me (Parts I & II)" and the hypnotic "Your Body's Callin'," are certified gold.

12 Play didn't come from nowhere. Kelly's first album, 1991's *Born Into the '90s*, went platinum. Though nearly invisible on pop playlists, the album had almost as solid an R&B fan base as Luther Vandross had on every album before *Power of Love*. Sure, it sounded like a Guy tribute record, but R&B heads were sparked. Since then, Kelly has written and produced hit tracks for Changing Faces and for his bride, Aaliyah. Her "Back & Forth" was the single that nudged "Your Body's Callin'" out of the No. 1 spot.

Both Michael and Janet Jackson are also reaching out for R. Kelly's Midas touch: He's done remixes for her, and he's written and produced a few new songs for Michael's greatest hits package. Kelly has also worked with Toni Braxton, Lisa Stansfield, N-Phase, Ex-Girlfriend, and the Winans. "What do now," Kelly has said of his music, "is what I know people want to hear. Sex sells." But there's more to it than that. He's definitely got a sound: People speak of "that R. Kelly feel." His music sounds almost as much as he does.

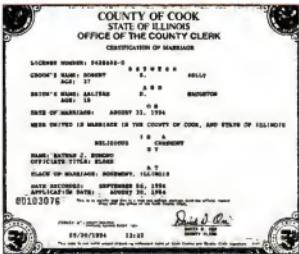
His second mother understands, kind of, what Kelly is up to. "He's not an old-fashioned soul singer," laughs McLin. "A lot of sexual flash is what he's doing now. We've not yet seen the heights to which Robert can go."

"Robert is an immense talent. I don't say that to build him up, I say it because I know what's there. Where he chooses to go with it is his decision." Out of nowhere, she adds, "Robert Kelly does not burn bridges."

"I took him to perform at major universities all over the States," she offers as explanation for that last remark. "Even took him to a music educators' conference in Austria. He was a sensation there, and everywhere he went. At Kenwood he performed *My Fair Lady, Carousel, Parlie*....He knows the Italian bel canto school of singing. He can sing classical music. My students learn breath control, diction, a little German, Italian, and French. When they get through learning that, they can sing what they want to sing."

Onstage at the Spectrum, R. Kelly's dancing girls preen and dance around like they did last summer when he was opening for Salt-N-Pepa. Kelly's moves are mostly the same too, but now he spends more time actually singing and less milking hormonal screams from the audience. In Philadelphia there is the same Kelly-directed, Kelly-as-superlover-fugitive short film to open the show; the same operatic intro to "Bump 'n' Grind" (McLin would be proud); the same audience patter. *So tell me, honey: Who's your bump 'n' grind nigga?*

AALIYAH SAYS SHE'S ENJOYED WORKING WITH KELLY. "IF I GOT TIRED, WE'D GO WATCH A MOVIE, GO EAT OR WHAT-EVER, AND THEN COME BACK AND WORK," SHE SAYS. "ME AND HIM ARE REAL-LY... WE'RE RATHER CLOSE."



But that's a stupid question. Kelly knows he's *the bump 'n' grind nigga*. Why him? Well, he's obviously more than an Aaron Hall spin-off (even though he shaved his head like Aaron, sometimes carries a staff like Aaron, and uses *some* of Aaron's vocal riffs). But somehow, R. Kelly seems deep, conflicted: classically trained vocalist vs. sex daddy; mom worshiper vs. adolescent girl lover. People are attracted to that. They like to watch other people working through their pain.

Robert has said that if it had been legal to marry his mother, he would have. Jamie Foster Brown, editor of *Sister Sister* magazine, was born in Chicago and has been writing about R. Kelly since he and some friends were singing under the name MGM. She remembers sitting behind R. Kelly at a show one night. Her companion tapped him on the shoulder and asked lightheartedly, "What must your mom think about all this sexy music you make?" According to Brown, Robert stood up and quietly left the theater with tears streaming down his face. His mother had died four days before. He didn't come out of the bathroom for 30 minutes. "Robert's emotions are raw," says Brown. "He's an extremely sensitive man."

Robert calls himself "a mama's boy," and that's a fine and normal thing. But in concert, he takes it to the next level. Toward the end of his hour-long set at the Spectrum, he begins to sing the Spinners' Mother's Day anthem, "Sadie"—dedicated, as always, to his own mom.

Pacing the stage like a lost kid, Kelly stretches the song out over 15 minutes. He starts off all churchy and reverential, but then his voice gets thick with erotic urgency. He prays for her, talks to her, and asks the audience to talk to her. Then he loses it, hopping and bouncing like the Holy Spirit is tugging his soul. "I know some of y'all out there don't understand me right now," moans Kelly.

On cue, a huge poster of his mom in a limo is lowered so the audience can see the object of his love. "I know I'm going on a long time with this," he says, sounding like a combo of Al Green and O'Kelly Isley. Anyone can see Robert's haunted. He asks the audience to pray for her and to her. Either he's truly losing it, or he deserves an Emmy. He sets this time aside—night in and night out—so he can worship his mother publicly.

"Take your time, baby, we understand," says a woman behind me quietly. "That's your mama."

Song over, R. Kelly leaves the stage and comes back out in a different vest. It's black patent leather and has the word HORNY embossed on the back in red. He sings the title song from *12 Play*: R. Kelly's personal instructions—how to touch and what to do—forgetting a girl off.

If anyone misses a beat, I don't feel it. All this mother-love and Jesus stuff goes orgasmic. Bizarre? Maybe, but the spectacle does break him out of the safe little sex factory he's so good at running. He's been accused by some critics of trafficking in "simulated soul," but R. Kelly *feels*. And because of the anguished trip he's taking onstage, somehow *you* know he knows there can be a heady, frightening sacredness when bodies come together. He knows that love is a strange thing and that it doesn't always come in the form we most desire, or the one most acceptable to society. And most important, Robert knows—and knows how to render through song—the often overpowering dynamic of desire. And *that*, for better and for worse, is a soul singer.

After he sings "12 Play," R. Kelly stands in the center of the stage and drops his pants. He doesn't have on any special cue, especially revealing drawers—just garden-variety white jockeys. And he stands there, hands in the air like Pavarotti, for a full 90 seconds until the curtain drops. There's nothing sexy about it. It's, like, I stand bare before you—accept me. Strange, but gritty. Nothing



he's ever recorded comes close. Maybe *this* is why he eclipses his contemporaries. He risks the consequences of abandoning his cool pose. He shows personal weakness—rare in black music today.

Kelly used to sing on the streets for money. He used to carry his keyboards out there and make music under the el train, sometimes making \$400 a day. With MGM, he won the \$100,000 grand prize on the syndicated, Natalie Cole—hosted TV talent show *Big Break*. Soon after, when internal disputes had him struggling to get out of a contract with MGM, Kelly met Barry Hankerson, Gladys Knight's ex-husband and producer of gospel musicals like *Don't Get God Started* and *One Monkey Don't Stop No Show*.

Kelly showed up, depressed, at Chicago's New Regal Theater, where Hankerson had just closed auditions for one of his plays. But when he sang for some female assistants, they told Hankerson he had to come down and hear this guy. Hankerson eventually helped Kelly out of his legal difficulties and got him signed to Jive records in 1990. By 1991, right before beginning his first album, Robert was introduced to Hankerson's niece, a young singer named Aaliyah.

"I sang for him," says Aaliyah, "and he liked my sound." From there, she says, they went to work on what would become *Age Ain't Nothin' but a Number*. Aaliyah was no amateur. She'd auditioned for TV shows, appeared on *Star Search*, and had even sung at Bally's Las Vegas with Knight. Still, Aaliyah says being in the studio was "new to me. I'd get there at 4 p.m. and not leave till 6 a.m. Robert and I are both perfectionists. We'll go over something a million times to get it right."

The process was difficult, but she has said she enjoyed it. "Me and him are really...we're rather close," she said before wedding rumors started flying. "If I got tired, we'd go watch a movie, go eat or whatever, and then come back and work. It was a great experience." Robert appears in all three of her videos, as well as on her album cover, which says, "Written and produced by R. Kelly especially for Aaliyah." Around her neck, Aaliyah wears a large gold medallion: a silhouette of Robert in his *12 Play* album cover pose. Kelly wears a medallion too: a Warner Bros. Tasmanian Devil. He says it's lucky.

"She's very self-possessed," says writer and graffiti artist Upski Wimsatt, who spent a day with Aaliyah and Robert in Chicago for a story last spring. "Almost the first thing he did was insult me." But things got better: "He and Aaliyah were charming together. It didn't seem wrong at all." They hung so tight that Robert ended up inviting Upski to sleep over when it got late. "Aaliyah spent the night, but she didn't sleep in the room with Robert. She was in another room. Her mom was there in another room too. And Barry Hankerson."

R. Kelly was leery about Wimsatt seeing him and Aaliyah together, but that didn't stop them from singing a duet spontaneously. He says that during the course of the day, Robert and Aaliyah held hands and stared into each other's eyes. "But they weren't kissing, or feeling on each other's butts or anything like that—that she would lean on his shoulder, maybe. And Robert would say, 'Aaliyah's my best friend, Aaliyah's my special friend.'

"Robert also told me," says Upski, "that he was in love with 'someone.'"

In the July 1994 issue of *Sister2Sister*, Jamie Foster Brown writes that "R. Kelly told me that he and Aaliyah got together and it was just magic." Robert is quoted as saying, "Aaliyah is a very, very, very, very special person. I could say 'very' for three years about her, and it still wouldn't be enough."



R. Kelly and dancer in concert

Brown also confirms that the relationship has been going on for some time now. "I've been hearing about Robert and Aaliyah for a while—that she was pregnant. Or that she was coming and going in and out of his house. People would see her walking his dog, 12 Play, with her baseball cap and sunglasses on. Every time I asked the label, they said it was platonic. But I kept hearing complaints from people about her being in the studio with all those men. At 15," says Brown, "you have all those hormones and no brain attached to them."

One of those people was fired up enough to call the VIBE editorial offices last September, out of what she called "moral indignation." The caller, who claimed to be in the know, said she thought what was going on with R. Kelly and Aaliyah was "sick." When pressed for a name, she would only say, "M's. Snoop with the scoop."

But Brown, on a lighter note, feels like R. Kelly and Aaliyah might just be a good match, "because Aaliyah has a mature mind, and Robert is such a big kid." But she also calls him wonderful, intense, engaging, brilliant. "He's young—not age-wise but in terms of personal development. But developing integrity, character—the stuff that the Magic Johnsons and Mike Tysons needed to know—he's stunted there. There's a lot for him to learn."

Kelly's dressing room isn't really all that Coolio's boy Scoop made it out to be. The carpet is kind of dirty, the food standard, low-budget deli fare. The room smells like sweat and feet and old coffee. Only guys are here—maybe because two weeks before, Robert's bodyguards Tyree Jameson and John Askew were arrested in New York and charged with raping a 22-year-old woman after a show.

Kelly is sitting for a VIBE photographer, wiping perspiration from his face and head, leaning back in an armchair, not smiling or mean-mugging, sipping from a tall plastic cup of ice water. He looks good, but the whole thing is strange: being photographed for a story he refuses on the advice of attorneys and highly paid advisers to be interviewed for.

The show was good, I tell him. He nods without looking at me. I ask how he is. He still doesn't look my way. Then Demetrius Smith, Kelly's personal assistant, gives me his nicest don't-even-try-it glare. I've been instructed not to break out my tape recorder, pen, or paper, and not to ask *any* questions. Finally, when Robert looks at me, I try my best to stare him down through the shades. Doesn't work.

At one point, two fans walk in—women in their twenties. After getting Kelly's autograph, they ask him about the rumors of his marriage. He just shrugs. They ask if it's true that Aaliyah is pregnant. He tells them in a low, raspy voice, "Don't believe everything you read."

I want to ask what a grown-ass man is doing with a teenage girlfriend. What's going on with him that he doesn't want or can't get with a girl his own age? I want to know if Aaliyah is being ravished and manipulated. I want to know if he's charming and eccentric—or if he's all lame and unable to deal with the mind of a grown-up girl. Or both.

R. Kelly speaks softly to me as the shoot is ending. He walks over, shakes my hand, and says, "Thank you. It was really nice meeting you." He thanks the photographer and then walks without a word into the bathroom. He has taken off his glasses, and I can see his eyes—small, brown, earnest, and plain. Like some of his weaker songs, they give me little. He's way offstage now—just him and his secrets: his teenage love, his mom, and the strange music in his head. I guess. □

ONSTAGE IN PHILLY, KELLY DROPS HIS PANTS. THERE'S NOTHING SEXY ABOUT IT. MAYBE THIS IS HIS SECRET: HE ABANDONS THE COOL POSE, SHOWS PERSONAL WEAKNESS—RARE IN TODAY'S BLACK MUSIC.



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TO THE RESCUE

For 30 years, Johnnie Cochran has made a career—and a fortune—fighting the power. He might even be the best trial lawyer in Los Angeles, but does he have the juice to get O.J. off?

By Sylvester Monroe

It was the first thing about the entire O.J. Simpson murder case that made sense. The date was July 22, five days after that surreal Bronco ride. Everyone in the packed, wood-paneled courtroom was rapt, every cough and shuffling of papers was picked up by the boom microphones and broadcast to millions of homes around the world. This was the one show that no one wanted to miss, and on this day, there was a new star on the scene. As O.J. raised his right hand and proclaimed that he was "absolutely, 100 percent not guilty," standing at his side was a strong, reassuring figure: Johnnie L. Cochran Jr.

For more than 30 years, black Los Angeles has turned to Cochran in times of trouble. But he's never seen a case like this before. Who has? What other courtroom conflict in this century has gained so much media attention and generated so much debate? "It's a very important trial," Cochran said, poker-faced, to the phalanx of reporters who surrounded him after that first, brief court appearance. "I'm glad to be a part of the team."

Cochran may turn out to be the key player, the missing link in Simpson's legal dream team of Robert Shapiro, Alan M. Dershowitz, and F. Lee Bailey. And that's because Johnnie Cochran almost always wins. He may be the best trial lawyer in L.A., and throughout his career he has amassed most of his victories—and more than \$45 million in settlements and judgments—representing black people in lawsuits against the machinery of the criminal justice system. So perhaps it was inevitable that he should find himself a critical figure in what may well turn out to be the most closely watched trial of all time, defending a famous black man accused of a heinous crime. Barbershops and opinion pages may continue to debate "how black" O.J. Simpson is, but when he found himself behind bars, he did what so many other black

Angelenos have done in their hour of need: He called Johnnie Cochran.

Jim Brown once made the same call. When the former Cleveland Browns running back and B-movie icon was tackled by attempted rape and assault charges in 1985, it was Cochran who helped discover evidence that discredited the woman making the charges and led prosecutors to unexpectedly drop the charges.

In 1989 troubled *ex-Diff'rent Strokes* star Todd Bridges made the call after being jailed for shooting a suspected drug dealer eight times in a South-Central crack house. Cochran got him acquitted.

In January 1994 Cochran joined Michael Jackson's defense team and played a pivotal role in settling a civil child-molestation lawsuit for a reported \$20 million.

Snoop Doggy Dogg called, and Cochran represented the rapper in his murder trial this past October. Cochran also defended Tupac Shakur in November against concealed weapon charges, a felony due to a previous conviction.

Though he's spent much of his career defending black clients, Cochran also represented Reginald Denny, the white truck driver who was brutally beaten during the 1992 Los Angeles riots. Cochran's firm is handling a \$40 million federal civil rights suit on behalf of Denny and three others who claim the police failed to protect them.

As for O.J., he had to personally convince Cochran to take on his case after he was charged with the murders of his ex-wife Nicole Brown Simpson and a friend of hers, Ronald L. Goldman. Cochran agonized over whether to join the defense team, concerned that his social and business contacts with Simpson might be compromising. "I thought about that a lot, because I've never represented a friend before," Cochran said after his first court appearance

on Simpson's behalf. "But I think I can represent him objectively. And besides, who else is best to be on your side but a friend?"

The glass marquee on the wooden office door says simply, JOHNIE L. COCHRAN, JR., INC. It's an all-black, 10-lawyer firm occupying a posh, 10th-floor law office on Wilshire Boulevard with a breathtaking view of the fashionable Hancock Park and Hollywood Hills sections of the city. While most lawyers in this neighborhood might shun highly publicized cases, Carl E. Douglas, Cochran's 39-year-old managing attorney, says that most of them couldn't work for Johnnie Cochran. "The lawyers that work here thrive on that environment," says Douglas. "We thrive on the energy. We thrive on the excitement. We thrive on the challenge. We are the kinds of lawyers who want the ball to take the last shot with the clock running down."

Douglas says he's one of many African-Americans who were motivated by Cochran to take up the law. He still remembers being inspired by Cochran as a teenager, seeing the lawyer on television with all this "stylishness and intelligence." Strolling down the hall, Douglas stops outside his mentor's office and glances at a photograph of a bloody hand being smashed by a police officer's truncheon. Fresh out of UCLA law school, Douglas saw a brochure with the firm's motto: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. —Dr. Martin Luther King Jr." He joined up.

L.A. is full of all-front-no-ass characters, but behind Cochran's flash—expensive, well-cut suits, tinted glasses, and a Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow with the personalized license plate JCJR—is a brilliant career built on the rock-solid substance of years of hard work and commitment. Cochran is embedded in Los Angeles. His three kids—Melodie, 32, a software company



THE MAN WITH THE MASTER PLAN

"Maybe I was destined to question that official version," says Cochran, "to represent those people who need representation the most."



Cochran is one of the most plugged-in lawyers in Los Angeles, the missing link in O.J.'s legal dream team headed by Robert Shapiro (center).

CEO; Tiffany, 24, a TV anchorwoman; and Jonathan, 21, a UCLA senior—were born and raised here, by Cochran and his ex-wife Barbara (whom he recently divorced after 19 years of marriage). In classic L.A. fashion, he works out regularly in his home gym with a personal trainer. In every way, he is a part of the fiber of L.A., and his knowledge of how the city operates and his close connections with many of the people who make it work—elected officials, judges, prosecutors, and community leaders—are his greatest assets as a lawyer.

"On one level, Johnnie benefits from having been raised, gone to school, and spent his entire professional life in the same city," says Douglas. "And that, in conjunction with his very engaging personality and obvious intelligence and wit, has endeared him to a wide spectrum of people over the years. He has colleagues on the bench who were classmates in law school and college, and who worked with him in the DA's office and city attorney's office and may even have tried cases against him." In Cochran, Simpson has got one of the most plugged-in lawyers in L.A. Even the man overseeing the case against O.J., district attorney Gil Garcetti, is a close friend who, back in 1977, worked under assistant district attorney Johnnie Cochran, then the No. 3 prosecutor in the L.A. County DA's office.

Born in Shreveport, La. in 1937, Cochran moved with his family to Los Angeles in 1949 and became one of approximately two dozen students who integrated Los

Angeles High School in the 1950s. After graduating from UCLA, he earned his law degree from L.A.'s Loyola Law School. He was a deputy Los Angeles city attorney from 1963 to 1965 and then began making a name for himself by representing black and other minority victims of alleged police brutality in the wake of the 1965 Watts riots. "While the people in the majority community are just discovering me," Cochran says, "I've been here all the time."

In 1966 he landed the case that launched his private practice and set the tone for everything that has followed. An unarmed black man named Leonard Deadwyler was speeding his pregnant wife to the L.A. County Medical Center when he was shot and killed by a Los Angeles police officer. Many black people—with memories of National Guard troops patrolling the streets during the Watts riots fresh in their minds—were outraged. The trial was televised, and though the jury upheld the police version that the shooting was justified, Cochran's impassioned argument on behalf of the dead man's family didn't go unnoticed.

"I was 27 years old," Cochran recalls. "Maybe I was destined to always question the official version, to represent those people who need representation the most. And I have never shied away from that. From that time till now, the guiding principle of my practice is still the same. You have to bring something to the representation of clients, some experience, a level of confidence and a state of poise and unflappability."

"The man has a way of resolving legal problems," says Edi M.O. Faal, a Cochran friend and colleague who defended Damion Monroe Williams, convicted last year for his part in the attack on Reginald Denny. "I think O.J. needed Johnnie, and I'm glad O.J. has him. But apart from the fact that he is a very skillful lawyer, something that makes him extremely successful is his unique ability to appeal to all people across the board, across racial lines. He would have been a very successful diplomat."

Cochran will have to be especially diplomatic as he navigates the minefield of racial tensions surrounding this case while at the same time turning Simpson's race into an asset. The heart of the defense strategy, he says, will be to plant seeds of "reasonable doubt" in the jurors' minds at every opportunity. At the very least, Cochran aims to wind up with a hung jury. "Whether we can find 12 people who will see the case our way, I don't know," he says. "But if I have my druthers, I want some black people on that jury so that the jury will have some credibility. No one will accept the verdict if there are no black people on it."

It will be equally important, however, to get the *right* black people. Many black women may not approve of O.J.'s well-known attraction to white women. On the other hand, black people who don't trust the criminal justice system might be just what the defense team needs. "If black people want to be with the prosecution after all the evidence is in, okay," Cochran says. "But I don't think that will happen, because if you are African-American, you don't necessarily accept the official version. When



Truck driver Reginald Denny (above), brutally beaten in million federal civil rights suit against the LAPD.

"IT'S BETTER TO WIN A CASE WHERE A GUY IS GUILTY AND GETS OFF," SAYS COCHRAN, "THAN TO HAVE AN INNOCENT CLIENT CONVICTED."

I started trying cases as a young city attorney 31 years ago, you would be almost held in contempt of court if you said a police officer was lying. But believability and credibility attach to the person and not his office. My experience is that it's not over till it's over."

Beyond determination and passion, Cochran brings a less tangible yet potentially invaluable asset to the \$58,800-a-week Simpson defense. Simpson's lead attorney, Robert Shapiro, insists that race will not be a factor in the trial, but it will be virtually impossible to keep race from playing a role, especially in the post-O.J. City of Angels. Ever since O.J.'s arrest, many African-Americans have expressed their concern that a black man can't get a fair shake in the American criminal justice system, even one like Simpson who seems to have tran-



Cochran joined attorney Howard Weitzman (left) in January 1994 and helped settle the child molestation lawsuit against Michael Jackson.

scended his own race for most of his professional life.

"Shapiro said this is not a racial case," says attorney Harland W. Braun, who defended Theodore Brisenone—one of the four police officers accused of beating Rodney King—and like many L.A. legal players is a longtime acquaintance of Cochran. "But so many African-Americans don't trust the criminal justice system—and for good reasons; it is racially biased—and that's why Johnnie is important. He's a spectacularly good lawyer, and he basically understands the racial crosscurrents in Los Angeles County. From my point of view, I look at the case and everyone wants O.J. to be innocent. With Johnnie in there, if there's a conviction, people will be confident that everything possible was done for O.J."

There's one other black man, defended by Cochran, for whom everything possible was done. The year was 1970, and Cochran was just four years into his private practice when he took on the defense of Elmer "Geronimo" Pratt. It is a case that haunts Cochran to this day.

Pratt, a decorated Vietnam veteran and deputy defense minister of the Black Panther Party, was arrested in 1970 for the 1968 murder of 27-year-old schoolteacher Caroline Olsen on a Santa Monica tennis court. Pratt steadfastly maintained that he was in Oakland—almost 400 miles away—attending meetings of the Black Panther Party's central committee when Olsen was shot to death and her husband was injured. But Pratt also happened



the 1992 L.A. riots, turned to Cochran to handle his \$40

to be in the midst of a dispute with Panther leader Huey Newton, who instructed Bobby Seale and David Hillard not to confirm his alibi.

Pratt was convicted and sentenced to life in prison. He's still behind bars today, and for Cochran, the hurt hasn't abated. He has continued to try to free Pratt, pointing to evidence that suggests he was framed as part of the FBI's infamous COINTELPRO program aimed at disrupting and neutralizing black organizations and leaders during the 1960s and '70s. "Geronimo Pratt's case has forever defined me," Cochran says, "because I was convicted of a murder he didn't commit. I knew he was innocent then, and I know he is innocent now. I will never rest until he is a free man."

More important, the Pratt case proved to Cochran that a lawyer's pragmatism goes only so far—there are some things that you have to care about. "It is better to win a case where a guy is guilty and gets off than to have an innocent client convicted," he says. "It taught me that you can work within the system and believe in it, but if the government wants to get you, they can certainly go out and get you. It also taught me that you never stop fighting."

This fall (and perhaps this winter as well), much of the world will watch Johnny Cochran again fighting for a high-profile black client. "There is a greater level of sensitivity by African-Americans who see one of their own in trouble, because they think his race has something to do with it," he says. "And very often it does. For some time, it has been open season on African-American males, and it runs the gamut from the regular citizen to the celebrity. I don't think this is any great coincidence. Whether it's Mike Tyson or Michael Jordan, there is a tendency to want to bring down people who have done well, and in representing these people, there is an extra burden. So when you drive down the street and people say, 'Johnnie, please save Michael,' 'Please save O.J.,' there is a sense that it can happen to Michael Jackson or O.J., it can happen to any of us."

No matter how difficult the case may be, Cochran is where he wants to be. Standing in the biggest arena of his

JIM BROWN (left, with the NAACP's Maggie Hathaway in 1971) also turned to Cochran (right) in his hour of need.



Celebrity clients like ex-*Different Strokes* star Todd Bridges (above, right) have brought Cochran much attention, but he's been defending the likes of Black Panther Elmer "Geronimo" Pratt (below) for over 30 years.



career, he has the ball, and the whole world is waiting to see if he can put it in the hole and set Simpson free. The stakes are even higher than they may at first appear: True believers of every stripe are hoping that Johnnie Cochran can help America rediscover its lost innocence. They want him to convince the jury that O.J. didn't do it, that heroes are still heroes, and that sometimes good guys can come out on top.

"The jurors are going to be critical, which is probably as important as anything else," he says. "In many respects, when we pick the jury, that's my home court. I know the building. I know the judges. I know the jurors. I know the prosecutors. And I like being in my home court." □

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CLIP **CHANGING FACES** Another C and C music factory

Just a slip of the tongue, and you can hear it: a bit of the New York City concrete jungle that Cassandra Lucas and Charisse Rose come from. It comes out loud and clear when I joke about their boyfriends: Probably two guys sitting around, waiting to count the Changing Faces dollars as they come rolling in. "Well, I don't know about that," says Cassandra, with the kind of emphasis that reinforces her round-the-way attitude. "We count our own money."

Right before Changing Faces perform, anybody can see that this is the start of something big. Charisse and Cassandra are wearing long, cream-colored dresses that show off tiny, well-proportioned frames. The place is crowded, and kids are having a ball.

When the girls get to their monster single, "Stroke You Up" (their eponymous, titled album debuted at No. 1 on *Bill-*

board's R&B chart), the crowd is open. The girls harmonize, "Do you mind if I stroke you up?" and the crowd screams back the hook that R. Kelly sings on the record: "I don't mind." The jam strokes everybody up and down.

After the show, the place is a melee. And these two girls—sexy, chocolate-colored, and both in their early twenties—are right in the middle of it. People want to touch them or at least get close, but the girls, who have been singing together for almost six years, don't seem to mind. After stints doing background vocals for Jeff Reid and touring with Sybil, it's nice, they say, to finally get to do their own thing. "The best thing to come out of touring," says Charisse, "is that now, when we step onstage, it's not new to us."

Charisse says this in a high-pitched baby voice, which is not the same as her high-powered singing voice. And when she slides it into place alongside Cassandra's throaty moans, it works. If people battled in R&B like they used to in rap, Changing Faces would take fools out. The only problem is, whom would they battle? Zhane? No matter; Charisse and Cassandra don't see singing as a competitive thing. "We want Zhane and everybody else to know," says Cassandra with a soul-sister smile, "that we're all in this together. We give them props."

It was Changing Faces' quest for their own props, *not* their punctuality, that got them where they are today. In the summer of 1993, when their search for a record deal was in full swing, the girls were late for their appointment with producer Kenny Korngay, president of Spoiled Rotten Entertainment, but caught him on his way out of the building. "He was, like, 'You're late. But if you can sing, then sing,'" recalls Cassandra. "We were real embarrassed. We didn't want to sing out on the street like that. But we did it, and it came off."

Korngay signed them and hooked them up with R. Kelly, Nevelle Hodge, Jodeci's DeVante Swing, and Dave "Jam" Hall—some of the best young producers in R&B. Charisse and Cassandra wrote most of the lyrics, sticking to sensual, bring-love-back themes. But even with plenty of love in their relationships, they'll still count their own money. You can ask their boyfriends. Chris Wilder

Charisse Rose and Cassandra Lucas

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BACK IN THE DAYS

Most of what you know about the old school is wrong. By Frank Owen. Illustration by Doze Green

The history of hip hop is much more complex than we've been led to believe. When searching for a single point of origin, most people speak of South Bronx block parties in the 1970s. But the music's roots run deeper and reach further back than that.

Just ask 39-year-old Clive Campbell (better known as DJ Kool Herc). "It started in Jamaica and became an American art form," says the living link between the music of Kingston and that of the Bronx. Campbell still vividly recalls his boyish excitement each month when sound system operator King George rolled into his Kingston neighborhood in the mid-'60s, wheeling humongous speakers in wooden carts through the streets of Lower St. Andrew, a respectable working-class community wedged between posh upper St. Andrew and Kingston, where the rude boys dwelled.

Campbell remembers the backdoor dances, illuminated by a string of lights, dark and scary to a youth not yet in his teens. The pungent odor of grass hung in the air, bottles of Red Stripe were strewn everywhere, a goat's head lay boiling in a pot. The local rudies lined up at the edge of the dance, stylish figures in slim-fit, James Bond-style suits. An occasional flash of metal sliced through the murk as a ratchet knife searched out its target. But most shocking of all was the bass-heavy attack of the sound system when it kicked on, a roar so loud it shook rib cages and windows alike.

Campbell carried these memories with him when, at the age of 13, he moved with his family to New York in search of a better life. Like many immigrants before him, he was shocked when he arrived in the Bronx. "I was expecting *Leave It to Beaver*—white houses with lawns and picket fences," says Campbell. "Instead, it looked like Trench Town, except the weather was cold and stores stayed open 24 hours."

But he adapted well to his new surroundings. His power on the basketball court earned him the nickname Hercules. When he became a graffiti writer, he shortened Hercules to Herc and added Kool. It wasn't spray paint, however, but vinyl that eventually made his name. "My initial inspiration," says Herc, "came from Jamaica, seeing people being entertained in the dancehall and wanting to do that for an American audience." And so hip hop's original DJ was born.

Pop culture wastes nothing; that which goes around comes around and around again. Not so long ago, the only folks getting excited about rap's founding fathers were fanatics living in Europe and Japan. But, as befits this decade's obsession with the '70s, the past year has seen a dramatic revival of

interest in hip hop's origins. "In the '80s nobody wanted to know about the old school," says Pee-Wee Dance of the Bronx's premier B-boy outfit, the Rock Steady Crew. "Now, all of a sudden, everybody wants to be down with us."

Old-school flavor pervades today's rap scene. Besides the '70s funk feel of Dr. Dre and his Cali cohorts, and "back in the day" songs by everyone from Ahmad to Coolio, there have been a rash of "old-school reunion" shows of late. And recent albums from Terminator X and the Scotti Bros. label feature new music from the likes of Kurtis Blow, Busy Bee, Afrika Bambaataa, Grandmaster Flash, the Furious Five, the Treacherous Three, Cold Crush Brothers, and Fearless Four. Meanwhile, the electro-funk that Bambaataa championed more than a decade ago is still going strong in the Southeast, as evidenced by last year's "Whoomp!" craze.

Be that as it may, given the shaky acquaintance most rap fans have with hip hop history, misconceptions about the old school are common. "Back in the day" may be a favorite phrase among rappers, but what particular day they're referring to depends on the rapper's age and knowledge. This generation has been passed down a partial version of history, filled with inaccuracies. Numerous myths need debunking:

• **Hip hop began in the South Bronx.** This statement—repeated innumerable times on record, in print, and in conversation—is open to dispute. Some insist that the culture's first stronghold was the West Bronx, but a history of hip hop would be incomplete without some reference to Jamaica and the influence of reggae sound systems.

• **Hip hop's original audience was made up of gang members.** Not so, according to Kool Herc. "Most of them were ordinary kids, not gangsters. When the gangs started showing up to parties, they nearly killed the hip hop. And they might have done it, if it wasn't for the influence that Bambaataa had over them."

• **Hip hop was exclusively a black thing.** Again, untrue. At the earliest Zulu Nation jams up in the Bronx, the crowd was racially diverse, mostly comprised of African-Americans, Afro-Caribbeans, and Latinos. But even then, what Bambaataa calls "progressive-minded" whites were making the trip uptown. "When the punk rockers first came to the Bronx River [Houses] and started mixing with the black and Hispanic kids, people thought there'd be trouble," says Bam. "But there wasn't. It was peaceful."

• **Hip hop was one type of music: hardcore.** "Hip hop used to be a free-form expression," says Grandmaster

Flash, one of the most technically accomplished of old-school DJs, who helped push rap toward social realism with "The Message." "Now it's more about conformity. In the old days, I played everything from Frank Sinatra to Thin Lizzy."

Rap fans, however, can hardly be blamed for their lack of knowledge about the music they follow. "Kids today have never had the real history of the old school taught them," says Herc. But it's not only the kids who are passing on mistruths. Last year Columbia University hosted a panel discussion with Bam, Herc, and Flash. They were introduced by the distinguished African-American studies professor Manning Marable, who described rap's inception as a reaction to the racist policies of the Reagan era. Hip hop, of course, was alive and breathing through the Carter years.

In the back of the room, Rock Steady Crew member Crazy Legs muttered, "This guy don't know shit about the history of hip hop."

Kool Herc wasn't the first DJ in the Bronx to talk over records. Before his emergence on the scene, "disco DJs" like Grandmaster Flowers and Pete Jones ruled such Bronx clubs as the Tunnel and the Puzzle in the early '70s, interspersing innocuous party charts with the latest cuts from James Brown or dance-floor R&B from the mighty Philadelphia International label. Herc found their style too smooth and their playlists too limited.

Influenced by dancehall's rough-and-ready spirit, Herc developed a style of spinning that emphasized rhythmic passages. Instead of playing the whole track, Herc would go straight to the instrumental break, extending it as will by flipping from one turntable to another. Such "breakbeats" became the foundation of hip hop music. Herc claims to have coined the term *B-boy* for those who danced to breakbeats.

At first Herc rapped simple street slang as he mixed—"Rock on my mellow" or "This is the joint." But later he employed MCs Coke La Rock and Clark Kent, two of many who were dubbed the Herculoids. Herc soon made the transition from playing block parties and schools to clubs, where he put on them nights: sneaker parties, hustlers' conventions. Things went well until 1977, when Herc suffered a near-fatal stabbing outside one of his parties. "The guy who did it," he says, "after the bouncers had finished with him, ended up staying in the hospital three weeks longer me."

After the stabbing, Herc's career began to falter. Unlike fellow Bronx pioneers Bambaataa and Flash, he didn't make the transition from deejaying to record-

ing. "I took a fall," he admits. "I got distracted. Drugs became a part of my life." About a decade ago, he disappeared from the hip hop scene altogether. During the '80s, while others got paid off his musical innovations, Herc supported himself with construction work.

Now, having completed a 12-step rehabilitation program, Herc is alcohol- and drug-free, his resolve reinforced by the birth of a son earlier this year. One myth about the old school that he is anxious to dispel is that hip hop was a direct product of the bombed-out South Bronx environment. "I lived in a nice neighborhood," he insists. Times were hard and getting harder, but brothers still turned out in expensive sheepskin coats and AJ Lester knits and paid their admission for Herc's parties.

No matter how rough things got, though, Herc's presence at the turntables guaranteed a certain code of behavior among the crowd. "Nobody ever got shot at one of my parties," he says. "They had too much respect for me." But if there's one person who embodies the idea of DJ-as-authority-figure even more than Kool Herc, it's Afrika Bambaataa.

Besides creating such seminal jams as 1982's "Looking for the Perfect Beat" and the futuristic "Planet Rock," Bambaataa is also the founder of the Universal Zulu Nation, an organization born out of the South Bronx gangs but dedicated to peace, unity, and self-knowledge. "When I came out of the Black Spades," says the soft-spoken former division leader of this notorious street gang, "and went straight into the hip hop thing behind Herc, a lot of gang members followed me. In the mid-'70s, gangs were dying out. The police were cracking down, community leaders were speaking out, women were fed up with the violence." A not dissimilar situation exists today, and perhaps the appeal of the old-school revival is that it offers up a magical solution, albeit one based on the rather naïve notion of reformed gangbangers dedicating themselves to good works in the community.

During the early '80s, Bambaataa reigned at the Roxy, a Manhattan club on West 18th Street that showcased the newly emerging hip hop culture for a Downtown audience. Exhibiting the eclectic musical tastes that earned him the title Master of Records, Bam presided over a crowd like hip hop never saw before or since: Celebrities like Madonna and Eddie Murphy mingled with break-dancers and graffiti artists; punks and new romantics rubbed shoulders with rappers and hustlers.

But by the late '80s, according to Bam, "it became musical apartheid. If you wanted house music, you went to this club, reggae another club, and hip hop yet another club. In the early '80s, everything was progressive. People listened to funk, soul, reggae, rock, calypso, hip hop all in the same place." But the Roxy wasn't just about music; it incorporated art, fashion, dance, attitude—the entire breadth of hip hop culture.

When 33-year-old Roxy regular Pee-Wee Dance got into hip hop at the age of 11, it was called the good foot, after the James Brown song, or the boyoyooing—a cryptic, evocative name that reflects its dance music roots. The biggest difference between then and now, according to Pee-Wee, is motivation. "Back in the day," he says, invoking the familiar phrase, "people did what they did to get attention. Nowadays, people are just in it for a dollar." When rap became big business, the industry wanted personalities to market. MCs grew to be the focus of the music and their bad-boy antics came to eclipse the DJs. The DJ's job had once been, in Grandmaster Flash's words, "to energize the crowd peacefully." But under the new rules, the rapper's job was often to incite the crowd with ever more incendiary images of killing cops or brutal sex. Hip hop was becoming less like dance music and

BY THE LATE '80S, ACCORDING TO BAM, "IT BECAME MUSICAL APARTHEID. IN THE EARLY '80S, EVERYTHING WAS PROGRESSIVE. PEOPLE LISTENED TO FUNK, SOUL, REGGAE, ROCK, CALYPSO, HIP HOP ALL IN THE SAME PLACE."

moving ever closer to the shock tactics of punk rock, a trend that heralded the rise of the gangstas.

We remember the members of hip hop's old school—or true school, as they themselves prefer to call it—in three ways. There are the legends—Bambaataa, Herc, Flash, Melle Mel, Kurtis Blow—whose influence endures today, whose early innovations provided the foundation for the future of the music. There are the semilegends, like DJ Hollywood—a big influence on Herc—and Grand Wizard Theodore, who many say invented scratching as a 13-year-old. Then there are the unsung heroes—names like DJ Smokey and the Smokatrons, Disco King Mario and the Chuck City Crew, Disco Twins, the El Brothers—important in their time, but now omitted from most histories.

The Cold Crush Brothers fall somewhere between semilegend and legend. Formed in 1979 from the ashes of half a dozen previous crews, Cold Crush—two DJs (Charlie Chase and Tony Tone) and a quintet of rappers (Grandmaster Caz, Money Ray, Almighty Kay Gee, Easy AD, and JDL)—were famous for their elaborate stage routines, four-way rap attack, and ethnic mix. "We didn't have hit records like Flash or Bambaataa," says Grandmaster Caz. "We had his stage shows."

For much anticipated battle in Harlem against their archivars, the Fantastic Five, Cold Crush took the stage to the strains of the *Godfather* theme, wearing three-piece suits and wide-brimmed hats. They even sprayed the crowd with fake machine guns. It all sounds a bit corny by today's hardcore standards, but back then, even "bad-boy" posing carried a party-time spirit. As Tony Tone says, "A lot of the fun has gone out of hip hop."

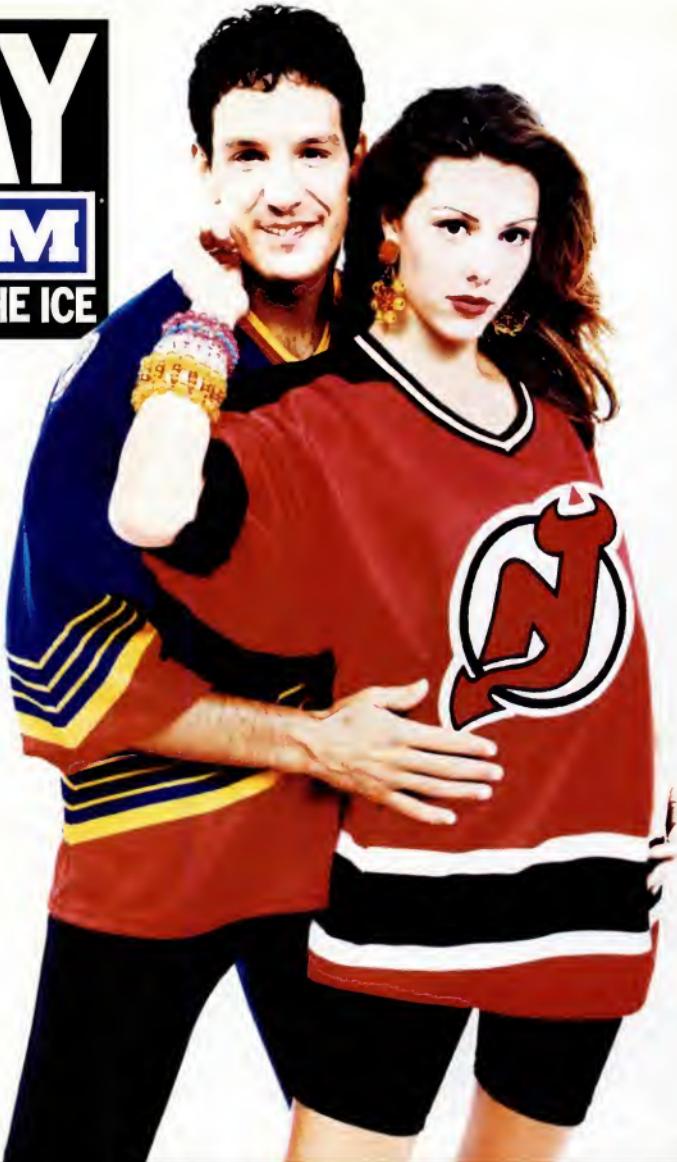
Unlike today's rappers, the Cold Crush Brothers didn't hone their skills in the studio but through intense verbal jousting onstage or on the street corner. Battling was the essence of hip hop then, but "people are afraid to battle today," says Caz. "In the old days, you battled to get a reputation. These days studio rappers are afraid to go head-to-head with real rappers because they're scared to risk their reps."

Rap veterans can sometimes sound like old men bemoaning how kids today have it easy. But given the number of former legends struggling to make a living, it's surprising how free of bitterness most of them are. "The only bitterness I feel is watching something I invented being used for negative purposes," says Kool Herc, referring to the increasingly violent and misogynist turn rap has taken.

"I don't want people to think we're all bitter," says Pee-Wee Dance, "but don't come and steal what we created and then turn and say, 'Fuck you, I've got a record deal.' If it wasn't for us, you wouldn't have that record deal to begin with. We're glad to see that hip hop has lasted this long. But hip hop is not supposed to be like this. This wasn't the intention."

Rap's movement from public parks, street corners, and community centers to stadium tours, pop charts, and record company boardrooms left most of the old school high and dry. Those who kicked their deepest rhymes back before there was an infrastructure to support long-term careers had to watch from the sidelines as their culture was transformed into a multimillion-dollar industry. Of course, that is the nature of the music: Rap's voracious appetite for new sounds and styles keeps it too busy reinventing itself to look back. Nonetheless, as Grandmaster Flash succinctly puts it, "without the old school, there couldn't have been a new school. But then again," he reasons, "without a new school, there couldn't have been an old school either." □

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TIME BOMB

Clocking the history of hip hop 15 years after "Rapper's Delight." By Harry Allen

First, the easy question: Why begin with "Rapper's Delight"? That record didn't really start anything, many would argue.

Hip hop's diverse expressions—its dance, music, and visual art—were going strong in the Bronx anywhere from five to 10 years before "Rapper's Delight" came out in the fall of 1979. The Sugarhill Gang were mostly from Jersey, anyway, and their rhyme style—by Bronx standards at the time—was *weak*. Big Bank Hank had *hit* the lyrics of Grandmaster Caz (of the Cold Crush Brothers) and didn't even bother to change Caz's patented "C-A-S-N-O-V-A" lyric. Among masters of live shows and park jams, Sugarhill had *no* routines, as their "Showdown" single with the Furious Five would clearly demonstrate later. In an age when the DJ was king, they had *none*. And anyway, the Fatback Band's "King Tim III (Personality Jock)" came out *first*. So why prop the Sugarhill Gang at all?



Rock Steady Park, New York City, 1993

Answer: Flawed as it is and controversial as the circumstances of its birth may have been, "Rapper's Delight"—of all the hip hop records that have ever been released (and there have been many, many great and greater ones)—is unique for one simple reason: It's the only record after which, no matter who you were or what you did in hip hop, *everything* was different. It changed the rules of the game. Its wide release made hip hop instantly international. Its commercial success renegotiated the scope of what was imaginable, possible, probable, doable.

Let's be clear: "Rapper's Delight" was not the beginning. Yet—and punists may cringe at this—it is the single most important release in hip hop history. This year marks the 15th anniversary of the record's debut—a great reason to look back at some of hip hop's high points, low points, and moments that maybe haven't been remembered but hopefully won't be forgotten.

79

- January 10: Kris Kross are born! Chris Smith, a.k.a. Daddy Mack, touches down five months after his future partner, Chris Kelly, a.k.a. Mack Daddy (August 11, 1978).
- July: "Good Times" by Chic (Atlantic) hits No. 1 on the pop chart, becomes a roller-rink favorite, and provides the bass line for "Rapper's Delight."
- September: The Fatback Band's album *Fatback XII*, including the proto-rap track "King Tim III (Personality Jock)," hits the pop chart.
- September: The Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight" is the first hip hop single released on the Sugar Hill label, formed in New Jersey earlier in the year by former R&B singer Sylvia Robinson. It's the first hip hop single to go Top 40.
- November: Tanya "Sweet Tee" Wimley releases "Vicious Rap," the first known hip hop recording by a female vocalist, on her dad's label, Paul Winley Records.
- November: The Universal Zulu Nation.



REED ANDREW/RETNA

80

- May: Kurtis Blow's "The Breaks" is released and becomes the first hip hop 12-inch single to be certified gold and only the second 12-inch single ever to do so. His "Christmas Rappin'," released in late '79, becomes the third 12-inch to go gold. Later this year, Blow releases the first hip hop album on a major label: Mercury Records.
- September 19 and 20: Kurtis Blow plays Madison Square Garden on a bill featuring Bob Marley and the Commodores. Also this year:
 - "How We Gonna Make the Black Nation Rise?" (Clappers) by Brother "D" with Collective Effort—the first hip hop recording to openly question the status of black people, preceding Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five's "The Message" by two years—is dated on its sleeve as being released this year. According to Brother "D" himself, it was actually released in 1981.
 - The Funky Four + 1 More get down at the Mudd Club. Though not widely noted or remembered, this and other shows expose much of New York's hip, white Downtown audience to hip hop, accelerating the co-optation of the form by the "mainstream."



LOUIE SIEGEL



SHANE HOGAN/RETNA

founded by seminal DJ Afrika Bambaataa on the principles of peace, unity, love, and fun, celebrates its fifth

81

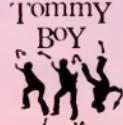
- February 14: The Funky Four + 1 More are the first hip hop musical guests on *Saturday Night Live*.
- April 28: The first major news article on B-boying (a.k.a. break dancing), "To the Beat Y'all: Breaking Is Hard to Do" by Sally Banes, is published in the *Village Voice*.
- July 9: ABC's 20/20 airs "Rappin' to the Beat," television's first national news story on hip hop.



MARTHA COOPER

- December 14: New York City mayor Ed Koch escalates his "war on graffiti" by allocating \$2.2 million to build double fences with razor-edged metal coils around 18 subway yards, in addition to the dogs that are already patrolling. These new efforts do not stop the writers either.

- Also this year:
 - Tom Silverman founds Tommy Boy Records in New York City. It becomes one of hip hop's most influential labels.



82

- April: "Planet Rock" by Afrika Bambaataa and the Soul Sonic Force (*Tommy Boy*) is released; it goes gold four months later. Advanced for its time, it also deeply influences what will later become the bass music style of hip hop from the Southeast.
- July: Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five's "The Message" (Sugar Hill) explodes. It's widely hailed by many for demonstrating that hip hop music can provide insightful social commentary.
- October: *Wild Style*, directed by Charlie Ahearn, premieres. The first feature film about hip hop culture, it stars authentic talent and officially opens in 1983.



- December: The New York City Rap tour—featuring MCs, DJs, dancers, and graffiti artists—travels to London and Paris. This is the first international tour featuring hip hop culture.

83

- **September 15:** Michael Stewart, 25, is arrested for writing graffiti on a New York subway wall. Thirteen days later, he dies in the hospital; the *New York Times* reports, "An autopsy found that Stewart's fatal come was caused by a spinal injury inflicted while he was being subdued." Stewart's controversial death precedes a host of police brutality cases that will mar the coming decade.
- **October:** Kool DJ Red Alert's show debuts on WRKS New York 98.7 FM, creating a prime-time, commercial radio showcase for new and established hip hop talent. In '86, Red Alert begins playing dancehall music as well, becoming perhaps the first hip hop radio DJ to acknowledge stylistic links between the two genres.



The Fearless Four

Also this year: • The Fearless Four, after releasing several well-received singles on the Harlem-based Enjoy label, become the first crew to sign with a major label: Elektra Records.

• Grandmaster Flash, e.k.a. Joseph Saddler, leaves the group Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five and begins a lengthy \$5 million lawsuit against Sugar Hill Records to regain control of the group's full name. He loses. The group reunites in the late '80s.

• Technics introduces the SL-1200MKII turntable, which will become the DJ standard.

• The Rock Steady Crew's brief but powerful appearance in *Fleshdance* catalyzes a worldwide break-dancing craze, though there is no hip hop on the movie's million-selling soundtrack.



JOANETTE BERNARD/RETNA

84

- **January 18:** Henry Chalfant and Tony Silver's *Style Wars*, the first documentary about hip hop culture, is broadcast on PBS.



VJ Ralph McDaniels

Lionel 'Vid Kid' Martin

- April: *Video Music Box*, the first music-video TV show devoted to hip hop, is founded by Ralph McDaniels and Lionel "Vid Kid" Martin, on WNYC New York.
- June 29: The short-lived program *Graffiti Rock* premieres on WPXI-TV New York. It features performances by popular hip hop groups like Run-D.M.C. and the Treacherous Three.



Also this year: • September: The 1984 *Swatch Watch New York City Fresh Fest*, hip hop's first national tour, debuts Labor Day weekend in Greensboro, N.C. Including 27 dates through Christmas, the tour—featuring Run-D.M.C., Kurtis Blow, Whodini, the Fat Boys, Newcleus, and New York's Dynamic Breakers—grosses \$3.5 million. Later, the Fat Boys sign an endorsement deal with Swatch.

• October 29: Eleanor Bumpurs, a black senior citizen, is killed by two shotgun blasts in her apartment by New York City police during a routine eviction for nonpayment of rent.

• November: Def Jam Recordings—an independent hip hop label in New York City co-owned by manager/promoter Russell Simmons and producer Rick Rubin—is founded in Rubin's New York University dorm room with an initial investment of \$8,000. The 12-inch single "I Need a Beat" by 16-year-old LL Cool J is the first record for both the artist and the label. Recorded for just \$700, it sells more than 100,000 copies.

• December 17: Run-D.M.C.'s self-titled debut album (*Profile*) is the first hip hop album to be certified gold. Also this year: • The Five Percent Nation celebrates its 20th anniversary. The tenets of this Islamic organization are associated with many prominent artists including Rakim.

Movies That Matter

1983: *Flashdance*, dir. by Adrian Lyne, *Style Wars*, dir. by Henry Chalfant and Tony Silver; *Wild Style*, dir. by Charlie Ahearn.

1984: *Bust Street*, dir. by Stan Lathan; *Breasin'*, dir. by Joel Silberg.

1985: *Poppin'*, dir. by Joel Silberg.

1986: *Good to Go*, dir. by Blaine Novak.

1987: *Desperoles*, dir. by Michael Schultz.

1988: *Coron*, dir. by Dennis Hopper; *I'm Gonna Git You Sucka*, dir. by Keenen Ivory Wayans.

1989: *Jason's Lyric*, dir. by Doug McHenry; *Surviving the Game*, dir. by Ernest Dickerson.

1989: *Do the Right Thing*, dir. by Spike Lee.

1991: *Boyz N the Hood*, dir. by John Singleton; *Cool as Ice*, dir. by David Kalodner; *New Jack City*, dir. by Mario Van Peebles.

1992: *Juice*, dir. by Ernest Dickerson; *Trapped* (previously *Looters*), dir. by Walter Hill; *Zorbahead*, dir. by Anthony Drazan.

1993: *CB4*, dir. by Yancey Davis; *Menace II Society*, dir. by the Hughes brothers; *Posse*, dir. by Mario Van Peebles; *Who's the Man?*, dir. by Ted Demme.

85

- **October 25:** Michael Schultz's *Krush Groove*, featuring performances by Run-D.M.C., the Fat Boys, LL Cool J, Kurtis Blow, and the Beastie Boys—made on a \$3 million budget—opens in 515 theaters nationwide and is cited as the No. 1 movie in America by *Verity* the following week. When a 17-year-old is thrown through a window after one New York screening, *Krush Groove* becomes the first to fall victim to the rap-movies-cause-violence paranoia that will grip the subgenre for the next decade.

Also this year: • Def Jam Recordings' co-owners, Russell Simmons and Rick Rubin, sign a distribution agreement for \$600,000 with Columbia Records, the largest major-label deal for a hip hop record company at the time. The first release under the agreement is the album *Radio* by LL Cool J. • *King of Rock* by Run-D.M.C. (*Profile*) becomes the first hip hop album available on CD.

EMILIE PARIS/RETNA



Doug E. Fresh

• "The Show" b/w "La-Di-Da-Di" by Doug E. Fresh and MC Ricky D. (e.k.a. Slick Rick) hits. Soon after, the two break up and pursue solo careers.

• Grandmaster Flash signs a solo contract with Elektra, followed by Grandmaster Melle Mel and other group members going for self. After their lack of success, the group reunites in 1987 as Grandmaster Flash, Melle Mel & the Furious Five for a charity concert at Madison Square Garden, hosted by Paul Simon.



Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five



JANETTE BERNARD/RETNA

89

• **January 3:** *The Arsenio Hall Show* airs its first episode. The program becomes the only late-night talk show to regularly feature hip hop artists as musical guests until its cancellation in 1994.

• **May 22:** In an interview in the *Washington Times*, Professor Griff of Public Enemy is quoted as saying

that Jews are responsible for "the majority of wickedness that goes on across the globe." The comment goes largely unnoticed until the story hits the *Village Voice* four weeks later, when the incident promptly goes nuclear. Griff later leaves the group due to the fallout from the controversy, and his own group, the Last Asiatic Disciples, is signed to Luke Records.

• **August 1:** An FBI representative sends a letter to Priority Records, regarding N.W.A.'s song "Fuck the Police" on the platinum-selling *Straight Outta Compton*. The letter suggests that the group is inciting "violence against and disrespect for the law enforcement officer."

• **August 6:** After not performing "Fuck the Police" throughout their first national tour, N.W.A. are chased from the stage by police as they start the song during the tour's final date at Detroit's Joe Louis Arena.

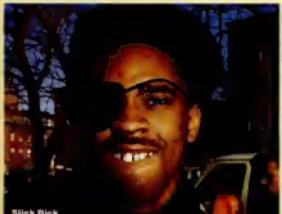
• **September 8:** Twenty-eight-year-old Keith Wiggins, a.k.a. Cowboy of Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five, dies in Queens after waking up two days earlier paralyzed from the waist down. He was perhaps one of the most distinctive vocalists and innovative stylists in early recorded and prerecorded hip hop.

• **October 13:** Salt-N-Pepa firmly establish themselves as one of hip hop's most commercially successful groups as "Push It" is certified platinum. Also this year:

• The cable

channel Video Jukebox Network (the Box) starts airing nationally and will succeed in breaking many artists after the decline of *Yo! MTV Raps*' video dominance.

• Slick Rick releases his first solo album, *The Great Adventures of Slick Rick* (Def Jam).



LIVE A PROFESSIONAL

90

• **June 6:** A federal district court judge in Fort Lauderdale rules that 2 Live Crew's "As Nasty As They Wanna Be" is obscene.

• **July 13:** Slick Rick shoots Wilbert Henry and Mark Plummer with a .38-caliber automatic in the Bronx for allegedly shooting up his car and attempting to rob him outside a local club three months earlier. Police chase Rick's car for more than two miles until Rick slams it into a tree and is surrounded by cops. Breaking his leg in the crash, Rick gets out of the car with his then six-months-pregnant girlfriend, Lisa Santiago. The police search the car and find six fully loaded weapons: two Tec 9 machine pistols, two 25-caliber handguns, a .38-caliber pistol, and a shotgun reported stolen from the Richmond, Va. police department. Rick is later arrested for and convicted of attempted murder. The incident eerily echoes the lyrics of "Children's Story" — from *The Great Adventures of Slick Rick* — which warns against a life of violence.

• **July 15:** Twenty-two-year-old Troy Dixon, a.k.a. Trouble T-Roy, dancer for Heavy D & the Boyz, dies in Indianapolis from injuries sustained in a fall from a 20-foot-high platform while the group is on tour. T-Roy's life will later be commemorated in Pete Rock & C.L. Smooth's 1992 hit "They Reminisce Over You (T.R.O.Y.)" (Elektra).



THE GETO BOYS

• **August:** Signed to Def American Records, which is distributed by Geffen Records, Houston's Geto Boys are dropped when CEO David Geffen objects to the group's violent and sexually explicit lyrics, especially in the song "Mind of a Lunatic." Rick Rubin, head of Def American, decides to end his distribution deal over the incident.

• **September 10:** *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* debuts on NBC, marking the first sitcom starring a rapper.

• **September:** The first episode of *In Living Color*, a comedy ensemble show, airs on Fox. In addition to live performances by prominent hip hop artists, the show highlights the "street-dancing" style of the Fly Girls, choreographed by Rosie Perez. The show comes to be seen as a watermark, validating the influence of hip hop on "mainstream" culture.

• **Also this year:** *Please Hammer Don't Hurt 'Em* (Capitol), M.C. Hammer's second record, is released. It goes on to take the all-time hip hop album sales record with 10 million in certified sales, passing the Beastie Boys' previous record of 4 million for *Licensed to Ill*.



2 LIVE CREW

• **January 27:** Dr. Dre violently assaults Dee Barnes, host of the TV show *Pump It Up*. Barnes sues Dre, and as part of his agreement with the court, Dre records a little-seen PSA about domestic violence.

• **March 4:** The videotape of L.A. motorist Rodney King being beaten by police officers on March 3 is broadcast nationally.

• **June 15:** *Et Tu, Brute?* by N.W.A. (Priority) enters the pop chart at No. 2 before going to No. 1, the highest album debut since Michael Jackson's *Bad*. It sells

1 million copies in two weeks, making it the fastest-selling gangsta rap record at the time.



PUBLIC ENEMY

• **August 27:** Public Enemy's Chuck D files suit against McKenzie River Corp., which markets St. Ides malt liquor, for sampling his voice in a radio commercial produced by DJ

Pooh. The parties eventually settle out of court for an undisclosed amount.

• **October 11:** Soon Je Du, a Korean grocer in L.A., is convicted of voluntary manslaughter for shooting black teenager LaTasha Harlins in the head after a fight over Harlins's alleged attempt to steal a container of orange juice.

• **November 16:** Ice Cube's *Death Certificate* (Priority) debuts at No. 2 on the pop album chart, selling more than 193,000 copies in its first week. The album, which ultimately goes platinum, sets off protests against what are perceived as anti-Korean, anti-Jewish, and antigay lyrics in songs like "Black Korea" and "No Vaseline."

• **December 18:** U.S. district judge Kevin Duffy finds Biz Markie and six other defendants, including Warner Bros. Records, guilty of illegally sampling Gilbert O'Sullivan's 1972 hit "Alone Again (Naturally)" on Biz's *I Need a Haircut* album. The incident has a massive chilling effect on the use of sampling in hip hop music production. The Biz's next album, in '93, will be titled *All Samples Cleared*.

• **December 27:** While attending a hip hop celebrity basketball game promoted by Sean "Puffy" Combs and Heavy D at the City College of New York, nine people are crushed to death when a breakdown in security causes a stampede. People are quick to blame the tragedy on hip hop, but a City University of New York investigation concludes that the security problems were not "isolated or unique" for events at the college.

• **Also this year:** *KDAY L.A.*, the country's only all-hip hop station, goes off the air, ending a seven-year run.

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• **January:** Kurtis Blow appears on the cover of England's *Blues & Soul* magazine, demonstrating the international appeal of hip hop's first major star.

• **June 21:** Run-D.M.C., performing on the *Raising Hell* tour at the Spectrum in Philadelphia, exhort fans to hold up their Adidas. Five thousand pairs of Adidas immediately go up in the air, as the crowd of 20,000 wets the trio rip into their hit single, "My Adidas." Their manager videotapes the moment and sends a



Run-D.M.C.

copy to the company. The gesture earns the crew an endorsement deal with the German footwear manufacturer. The company manufactures four Run-D.M.C. styles: the Eldorado, the Brougham, and the Fleetwood (named after the group's three favorite Cadillac models), and the Ultra Star.

• **August 17:** Fighting breaks out between gang members attending the Long Beach Arena date of Run-D.M.C.'s *Raising Hell* tour. Police, summoned by promoters when the melee erupts at 7:35 p.m., don't arrive until 11. Forty-two people are injured in what is, up to that time, hip hop's most notoriously violent event. The California arena had already established a 16-year history of violence at concerts. Some of the previous incidents: In 1970, 46 were arrested at a Jethro Tull show; in 1971, 21 were arrested after battling with police at a Ten Years After show; in 1972, 31 were arrested on drug charges at a Led Zeppelin performance; in 1985, a young concertgoer was injured when he fell from a balcony onto his head at a Purple Show.

• **December 4:** Run-D.M.C. are the first hip hop artists to appear on the cover of *Rolling Stone*, an honor they earn as a result of *Raising Hell's* (Profile) becoming hip hop's first multiplatinum album. (To put this in perspective, *Raising Hell's* 3 million certified sales will only be matched by hip hop's best-selling album in 1993, *The Chronic*.)

1984: *Hip-Hop: The Illustrated History of Break Dancing, Rap Music and Graffiti*, by Steve Hager (St. Martin's).

1987: *Tougher Than Leather: The Authorized Biography of Run-D.M.C.*, by Bill Adler (Signet).

1990: *Signifying Rappers*, by Mark Costello and David Foster Wallace (Ecco); *Subway Art*, by Martha Cooper (Henry Holt).

1991: *Bring the Noise: A Guide to Rap Music and Hip-Hop Culture*, by Havelock Nelson and

Michaela Gonzales (Harmony); *Nation Conscious Rap*, edited by Joseph D. Eura and James G. Spady (PC International); *Rap Attack 2: African Rap to Global Hip-Hop*, by David Toop (Sentient's Tail); *Rap: Portraits and Lyrics of a Generation of Black Rockers*, by Bill Adler, photographs by Janette Beckman (St. Martin's); *Yo! Revolution: Rap's History, Its Groups, Its Movement*, by David Dufresne (Ramsay).

1992: *Break It Down: The Inside Story From the*

• **February 24:** At the 29th Grammy ceremony, a trio of young, white New York rappers called the Beastie Boys present the Best Male Rock Vocalist award to Robert Palmer for "Addicted to Love." But before announcing the winner, they interrupt the proceedings to play a taped portion of Public Enemy's unreleased "Timebomb."

• **March 7:** *Licensed to Ill* by the Beastie Boys (Def Jam) becomes the first hip hop album to hit No. 1 on the pop album chart, after first charting in November 1986.

• **August 27:** Twenty-five-year-old Scott Monroe Sterling, a.k.a. DJ Scott La Rock of Boogie Down Productions, dies at 1:25 a.m. from gunshot wounds to the head. Along with Blastmaster KRS-One, he has just



produced *Criminal Minded* (B-Boy), now considered one of the landmarks in recorded hip hop music. La Rock is later memorialized at Madison Square Garden by KRS-One in a show that also features Public Enemy.

• **September 10:** A fan is stabbed to death at the Nassau Coliseum in Uniondale, N.Y., during a date on the Dope Jam tour, after a patron brings a knife into the arena.

Also this year:

• *Street Frogs*, the first "rap-music-oriented Saturday-morning cartoon," makes its TV debut. It dies a quickly quick death, only to be followed by the now virtually forgotten *Just 'n Rap* cartoon (1990), and then the notorious *Hammerman* (1991).

• Just Ice—who once acted the part of a gangster on *America's Most Wanted*—dubs himself "the original gangster of hip hop" on his album *Back to the Old School* (*Sleeping Bag/Fresh*).



GUIDO ANDREWS

Hip Hop Lit

New Leaders of Rap, by Michael Small (Citadel); *Fresh Fly Flavor*, by Fab 5 Freddy (Long Meadow); *Rap the Lyrics: The Words to Rap's Greatest Hits*, by Lawrence Stanley (Penguin).

1993: *It's Not About a Salary: Rap, Race & Resistance in Los Angeles*, by Brian Cross (Routledge, Chapman, & Hall).

1994: *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, by Tricia Rose (Millbrook).

• **January 15:** The single "Self-Destruction," by the all-star hip hop group Stop the Violence Movement (Jive), is released to counter the rising tide of violence associated with hip hop. A commemorative book—*Stop the Violence: Overcoming Self-Destruction*, published by the National Urban League—will be released in 1990. The STV project will go on to generate at least \$600,000 for that nonprofit organization's empowerment programs in the inner cities.

• **February:** The first Grammy is awarded in the Best Rap Performance category to DJ Jazzy Jeff & the Fresh Prince for "Parents Just Don't Understand." This year they release *He's the DJ, I'm the Rapper* (Jive), their second album and one of hip hop's first double albums, which becomes certified double platinum.

• **July:** Heavyweight champ and hip hop icon Mike Tyson fractures his right hand in a street fight with boxer Mitch "Blood" Green in front of hip hop clother Dapper Dan's Boutique in Harlem.

• **July:** Melle Mel vics Mike D's New Music Seminar championship belt onstage.

Queen Latifah



• **September:** Dana Owens, a.k.a. Queen Latifah, debuts with the single "Wrath of My Madness" (Tommy Boy).

• **August:** Colored out by white Harvard students David Mayes and Jon Schecter as a newsletter for the Street Beat radio program, *The Source* magazine publishes its first issue.

• **September:** *Yo! MTV Raps* premieres on MTV, with former graffiti artist and occasional rapper Fab 5 Freddy as host.

• **November:** Tone-Lōc's "Wild Thing" video debut on MTV, and the

record soon sells more than 2.5 million copies. "Wild Thing" is later blamed in some circles for inspiring the vaguely defined phenomenon known as wilding and for inciting the rape of a jogger in New York's Central Park in April 1989.



Tone-Lōc

It's not easy at first,
but hey, neither are
a lot of things.



Dewar's

• **January 23:** Rolling Stone pushes Public Enemy off its cover in favor of a story on Clarence Thomas by Hunter S. Thompson. Earlier this month, PE released the video "By the Time I Get to Arizona," whose explosive imagery attacks that state for not legislating a Martin Luther King Jr. holiday. The song draws fire from state officials and lands Chuck D on *Nightline*.

• **January 31:** Prince Be of P.M. Dawn is pushed off the stage during his own album release party by KRS-One and the BDP crew for allegedly dissing KRS-One in an interview that appeared in *Details*.

• **February:** Kari Kani begins production of his distinctively looged, loose-fitting, street-chic sportswear. Within two years, aided by ads that feature artists like Snoop Doggy Dogg and Tupac Shakur, the company will earn between \$30 million and \$40 million.

• **March 26:** Former heavyweight champ and hip hop hero Mike Tyson is sentenced to six years in prison for a July 1991 sexual assault on Desreee Washington.

• **April 18:** Totally Krossed Out by Kris Kross (Ruffhouse/Columbia) hits the charts, propelled by the first single, "Jump," and the duo's back-to-back clothes.

• **April 29:** Los Angeles bursts into flames after the four police officers charged with brutalizing Rodney King are acquitted. The L.A. riots eventually tally 58 dead and damage approaching \$1 billion. Hip hop artists like Ice-T and Ice Cube are cited in the media as having predicted such a catastrophe in their lyrics.

• **April 30:** After an eight-year run as one of the most successful sitcoms of the '80s, *The Cosby Show* airs its final episode.

• **May 18:** "I've never heard of them," President George Bush says of Ice Cube in *Newsweek*. "But I know that rap is the music where it rhymes."

• **June 29:** In its cover story titled "Rap and Race: Beyond Sister Souljah—The Politics of Rap Music," *Newsweek* reports that while addressing Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition Leadership Summit, presidential candidate Bill Clinton quotes Souljah's comments from a Washington Post interview, but takes her words out of context.

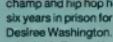
• **June:** Police groups nationwide call for a boycott of Time Warner products unless Warner Bros. Records withdraws the song "Cop Killer" from its self-titled album of E.T.'s heavy-metal group, Body Count. On July 30 President Bush calls the song "sick." A month later, Ice-T pulls it from the album, citing death threats received by Time Warner as his reason.

• **July:** Tommy Boy Records drops artist Paris amid controversy, after an employee leaks word of his song "Bush Killia" and his album artwork for *Sleeping With the Enemy* (an assassination fantasy starring President Bush and Paris).

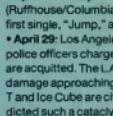
• **December:** Russell Simmons appears on the cover of *Black Enterprise* magazine. By this time, his company, Rush Communications, is the second largest black-owned entertainment firm in the U.S.



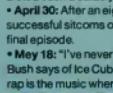
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Mike Tyson



Kris Kross



Police officers



The Cosby Show

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• **January 28:** In a controversy over artwork and lyrics for his upcoming album *Home Invasion*, Ice-T leaves Warner Bros. Records. He is quickly signed by Priority.

• **March:** Redman, thanks to his marijuana-exotiling *What? Thee Album*, hits the cover of *High Times*, e year after Cypress Hill became that mag's poster boys for much the same reason.

• **June 7:** The Rev. Calvin Butts abandons his attempt to steamroll "offensive" rap music at a protest rally in New York City. He encourages the crowd to trample the CDs and cassettes instead.

• **July 14:** Royal Rapper Howard, 19, is sentenced to death for murdering a Texas state trooper the previous April. Howard claimed that Tupac Shakur's song "Soulja's Story" made him do it, marking the first time that a specific song and artist are used as an alibi for murder.

• **July 16:** Cypress Hill's *Black Sunday* (Ruffhouse/Columbia) debuts at No. 1 on the pop chart and sells more than 260,000 copies in the first week.

• **August 22:** The sitcom *Living Single*, starring Queen Latifah, debuts on Fox, showing that Latifah—who also founded her own label and management company, Flavor Unit—can do more than just rock a rhyme.

• **August 29:** Posty—eight years after the A-bomb was dropped on Hiroshima (August 6) and Nagasaki (August 9), Kris Kross are required to change the cover artwork for the Japanese editions of their second album, *Da Bomb* (Ruffhouse/Columbia), when its photo of a nuclear explosion and the title cut's references to Hiroshima are deemed offensive by executives within Columbia's Japanese-based parent company, Sony.

• **September:** *Vibe* magazine is launched with Snoop Doggy Dogg on the cover. Snoop subsequently appears on the September 30 Rolling Stone cover (with Dr. Dre), even though his highly anticipated Doggystyle debut hasn't come out yet.

• **November 7:** Timberland executive vice president Jeffrey Swartz is in a *New York Times* story that while the company enjoyed a 46 percent sales increase from the previous year, the urban market consisted of a negligible 5 percent of sales. This blatant dis of the hip hop nation's support of the Hampton, N.H.-based company's products incites an informal boycott of Timbs and spawns bootleg T-shirts emblazoned FUCK TIMBERLAND.

• **November:** Around the time WBLW announces a ban on certain hip hop records, New York radio station WOHT ("Hot 97") changes its format from dance to hip hop and initiates the slogan "Where hip hop lives," making it the only hip hop-based station in town.

• **Also this year:** Eric B. & Rakim, the creators of such hits as "My Melody," "Eric B. Is President," and "Paid in Full," split up and pursue their own solo careers.

• **Additional reporting by Eric Berman, Ian Landau, OJ Lima, Daron Murphy, and Joseph V. Tirella**

• **February 23:** Representative Cardiss Collins (D-Ill.) and Senator Carol Moseley-Braun (D-Ill.) hold hearings on Capitol Hill regarding explicit lyrics in pop music. The event becomes known as the "gangsta rap hearings."

• **February 24:** "Whooplitz (There It Is)" by Tag Team, on the black-owned label Bellatrix, reaches certified sales of 4 million copies, making it one of hip hop's biggest-selling singles. The song starts a catchphrase heard round the world.

• **March 7:** 2 Live Crew win a copyright-infringement suit brought by Acuff-Rose Music, claiming that the Crew made unfair use of Roy Orbison's "Oh Pretty Woman." The Supreme Court holds that 2 Live Crew's "Pretty Woman" is a parody and is therefore protected under copyright law.

• **May 22:** Masta Killa, down with the Staten Island rap group Wu-Tang Clan, punches journalist Cheo H. Coker in the eye because members of the crew disliked artwork that accompanied Coker's article in a recent issue of *Entertainment Weekly*.

• **July 25:** Twenty-three-year-old Clarence Lars, a.k.a. DJ Train, is burned to death in a fire in his mother's Los Angeles home. Train worked with the crew J.J. Fad on their hit record "Supersonic" and later with M.C. Ren of N.W.A fame.

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• **August 18:** The Sugarhill Gang perform "Rapper's Delight" at *Vibe's* first anniversary party. The crowd—including L.L. Cool J, Treach of Naughty by Nature, D.J. Premier of Gang Starr, and Heavy D—goes wild, highlighting this year's resurgent interest in the old school."

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• **November:** The Universal Zulu Nation celebrates its 20th anniversary. Also this year:

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HOW THE WEST WAS WON

If the sun rises in the East, how come the West Coast is grabbing all the loot? By Cheo H. Coker

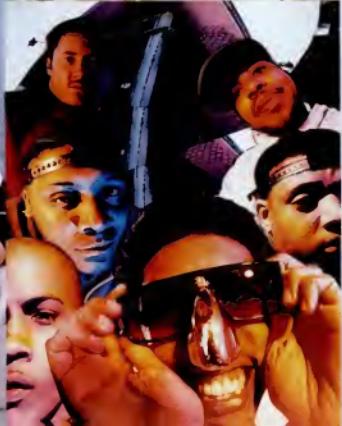
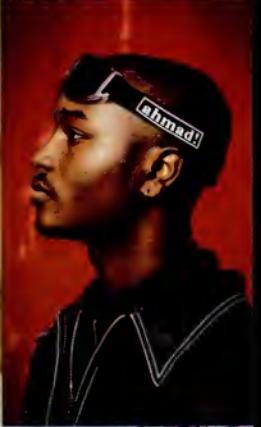
*I'm not a tongue-twisting rapper with a funny style
 Don't dress hip hop and dance real wild
 But I do sell records like a muthafucka
 Even though you might think I'm just another sucka
 I find a beat and then never switch
 Grab the microphone and then call you a bitch!
 —Too Short, "In the Trunk"*

Splotting his multiplatinum "pay style" over a funkified backdrop, Todd Shaw spoke volumes for a West Coast rap community that, way back in the B.C. ("before *Chronicle*") age, grew sick and tired of trying to earn respect in the towering concrete jungle that was rap's birthplace. There's a new attitude out West. You can almost hear it in Too Short's simple doffed bass line: *Who really cares whether our records sell in New York? They sell everywhere else—Atlanta, Houston, Detroit, Cleveland—all them places where niggas really buy records instead of snatchin' up a boodle. Let them fools make Walkman beats for the subway; my shit is booms for people who ain't got no train. Laugh all you want, but one day the West Coast is going to rule hip hop.*

Who's laughing now? Death Row Records sold more than 9 million

units in 1993. Dr. Dre and Ice Cube, former N.W.A partners and soon-to-be *Helter Skelter* collaborators, have never released anything that didn't go platinum (usually double that). Even Eazy-E, by and large the most disrespected man in hip hop, manages to go at least gold with every single he drops (last year's uninspired EP went almost triple platinum). Too Short has gone back and forth between platinum and gold over five albums, both DJ Quik albums went at least gold, and between movie roles and heavy-metal tours, Ice-T has maintained gold-plus sales for close to a decade. Add Warren G and Coolio to that ever-growing list. And we haven't even mentioned Vallejo, Calif.'s E-40, who managed to sign a seven-figure deal with Jive Records based on the hundreds of thousands he was selling through his own independent network.

Looking eastward, however—dope as they may sound to *some* ears—Nas and Jeru will be lucky to go gold. Wu-Tang did it, MC Lyte did it, A Tribe Called Quest finally did it, but with the exception of the Def Jam supergroups (and Salt-N-Pepa, who seem to belong to another category), most New York rap records never break that barrier. Let's face it, them so-called backward-ass, pop-lockin' pimps and playas with the gold teeth, perms, and played-out P-Funk beats are running hip hop ragged. Just ask Crooklyn



Dodger Masta Ace. Last year he came out with "Jeep Ass Niguh," a hard-thumpin' New York song that made barely a ripple on the national level. Then he went back into the studio with the exact same vocal track, slowed the tempo, layered on heaps of bass, let some air out the tires, and was soon "Born to Roll." That song got heavy rotation everywhere but New York.

Not so long ago, New Yorkers didn't give a damn about anything outside the five boroughs. But it's getting harder every day to say that the West Coast style isn't affecting eastern sensibilities. Maybe it was the day I spent walking around "Illtown," N.J., a week after *The Chronic* first hit stores and heard four passing cars each blaring a different cut from the album. Or maybe it was hearing so many people saying, "It's all good," and wearing bandanas that might get them shot out West—but the gap seems to be closing rapidly.

West Coast rap has crept up so fast, the lines between the competing hip hop schools are beginning to blur. The Big Mikes and Magic Mikes, the Geto Boys, Luke, and OutKats of the world have proved this much: It's not New York vs. L.A. anymore, but New York vs. Everywhere Else. Even select tracks on the new albums from N.Y.C.'s own Notorious B.I.G. and Brand Nubian sound geared just as much for the Left Coast as for the conscious Gods of Now Rule and Medina. The R&B of Jodeci, R. Kelly, and Blackstreet are all extensions of California G-funk, the only style in recent memory to attack rap and new jack swing simultaneously, changing the overall ambience of '90s black music.

When you're rolling out West, the party's in your car. It's hard to appreciate Cali funk unless you're cruising at an easy pace with the top down, sunshine in your face, and a slight breeze wafting through the palm trees. Nobody's in a hurry to get anywhere. Even when passions run hot, the vibe is serene, though the bass can cave in chests from blocks away.

Shit ain't like that in the Rotten Apple. The pace is hectic, the streets congested; everyone's trying to get somewhere yesterday and talking a mile a minute. New York hip hop is engineered for the headphone experience. The rapid-fire lyrics, flip-fantastic styles, and battle motifs zip from ear to ear so fast you almost forget about the stench of smog and urine hanging in the subway platform air. Even those New York records geared for the boomin' trunk-juju's "Come Clean," and just about anything released by Wu-Tang Clan and the Boot Camp Clique (Black Moon, Smif-N-Wessun)—have a different effect, propelling the driver forward on pure adrenaline.

Los Angeles has its own copyrighted style: hard thump bass with balmy, cursive melodies on top to level the sound. If New York makes beats for the head, L.A. is strictly for that ass. That's one reason West now outsells East. The grooves are better suited to the wide-open spaces of the South and Midwest, as opposed to the claustrophobic beat collages emanating from Queensbridge, Bushwick, and Staten Island—to say nothing of Roxbury or West Philly. On a linguistic level, New York has always been in its

own universe. Any person not from the tri-state area is considered "country," an attitude that leaves the rest of the country feeling left out.

New Yorkers will give you a million and one reasons why the East is artistically superior. They'll tell you the West leads on the SoundScan charts only because, as the *New York Times* theorized, "its violence-filled lyrics and danceable melodies make it accessible to the casual listener." But the truth is much more complex. Profanity doesn't sell for its own sake. Something else drives the West Coast sound, a raw undercurrent beneath the silky melodies.

By experimenting with live musicians, the G-funk nation has done its bit to resurrect R&B in the same way groups like A Tribe Called Quest and Gang Starr pulled jazz out from the back of the record crates. Kids from the ghettos of South-Central, East Oakland, and Valley might not have had much access to Trane and Miles growing up, but they damn sure remember their folks rocking to the Afro-Mexican grooves of War, not to mention Earth, Wind & Fire, Leon Heywood, and Rufus.

When Dr. Dre, Too Short, and DJ Quik threw out the racks of samplers and went all the way live in 1992, something new and exciting happened to West Coast music. Instead of copying the breakbeat-driven sound of the East or the electro-beat high energy of the South, they returned to the funk of their childhood. The structures were borrowed from the masters, but by injecting live ambience, Dre and a few others proved that they were not just sample arrangers but producers capable of shaping their own slinky sound.

And lest you think G-funk is the only thing bubbling out West, guess again. Besides Oakland's Hieroglyphics crew, there's L.A.'s Pharcyde and countless underground heads keeping the freestyle scene on point. And the down-low-players—like Vallejo's Mac Mall, Potta Deuce, Ray Luv, and San Francisco's JT the Bigga Figga, Herm, and Rappin' 4-Tay—might sound country to some, but last September in San Francisco, 4-Tay's "Playaz Club" outsold Boyz II Men.

Is West Coast rap better than East Coast because it sells more? No, it's New York rap by definition more complex or artistically superior? Not always. But East Coast rap heads better start putting their money where their mouth is if they want to get the props they think they deserve. Don't complain that the Ultramagnetic MC's, Organized Konfusion, and KRS-One don't sell as many records as they should; start buying their albums instead of hitting the bootleg table or dubbing your man's tape. The West snuffed the East from behind because they supported their artists, keeping them alive before the Hot 97 and KMELs of the world hopped onto the hip hop bandwagon. That's what representing is all about.

On "Paystyle," a song from his new, sure-to-be-platinum LP, *Cocktails*, Too Short drops another pearl of wisdom: "Dr. Dre, Ice-T, and all the rest / All that money we makin', don't fault the West / 'Cause we ain't the ones who created rap / But when we made the shit, we made it phat." Beeyatch!!



ALL IN THE SAME GANG
(Clockwise from top) Patina Deuce, Easy (with his bone); Thugs N' Harmony,
Above the Law, Ice-T

OBEDY
your
thirst. SPRITE





AARON HALL

It's a doggy dog world

Remember the scene in Aaron Hall's "I Miss You" video when he gives a black pit bull puppy to his girlfriend? That wasn't a prop. It was a proud specimen from Hall's own personal dog pound. In fact, if that single hadn't brought Hall's post-Guy singing career back to life, he would have devoted more time to his other job: dog breeding.

Hall's modern, split-level house sits at the end of a cul-de-sac in a suburban neighborhood near Virginia Beach. On the living room walls hang framed platinum albums and posters of Guy. There's also a velvet portrait of a rottweiler that looks a lot like the plaster-cast sculpture by the front door. On the coffee table, next to a copy of *Vogue*, there's a book called *Hollywood Dogs*.

Throughout the immaculately clean house, there are 26 real dogs—15 of them newborns. The puppies are kept in a whelping box in the basement, where Hall descends to nurse them with a bottle three times a day. As for the other dogs, who sleep in a kennel outside, he cooks them a combination of rice, liver, milk, and a "secret ingredient" that gives them "bulk."

Growing up all over New York, Hall—who refers to himself as a "little black pit bull"—dreamed of being a veterinarian but didn't like school. He earned his canine knowledge after high school by hanging around a vet's office in Brooklyn, where he learned to clip dog tails and administer shots. In 1984 Hall got his first purebred dog with papers—three

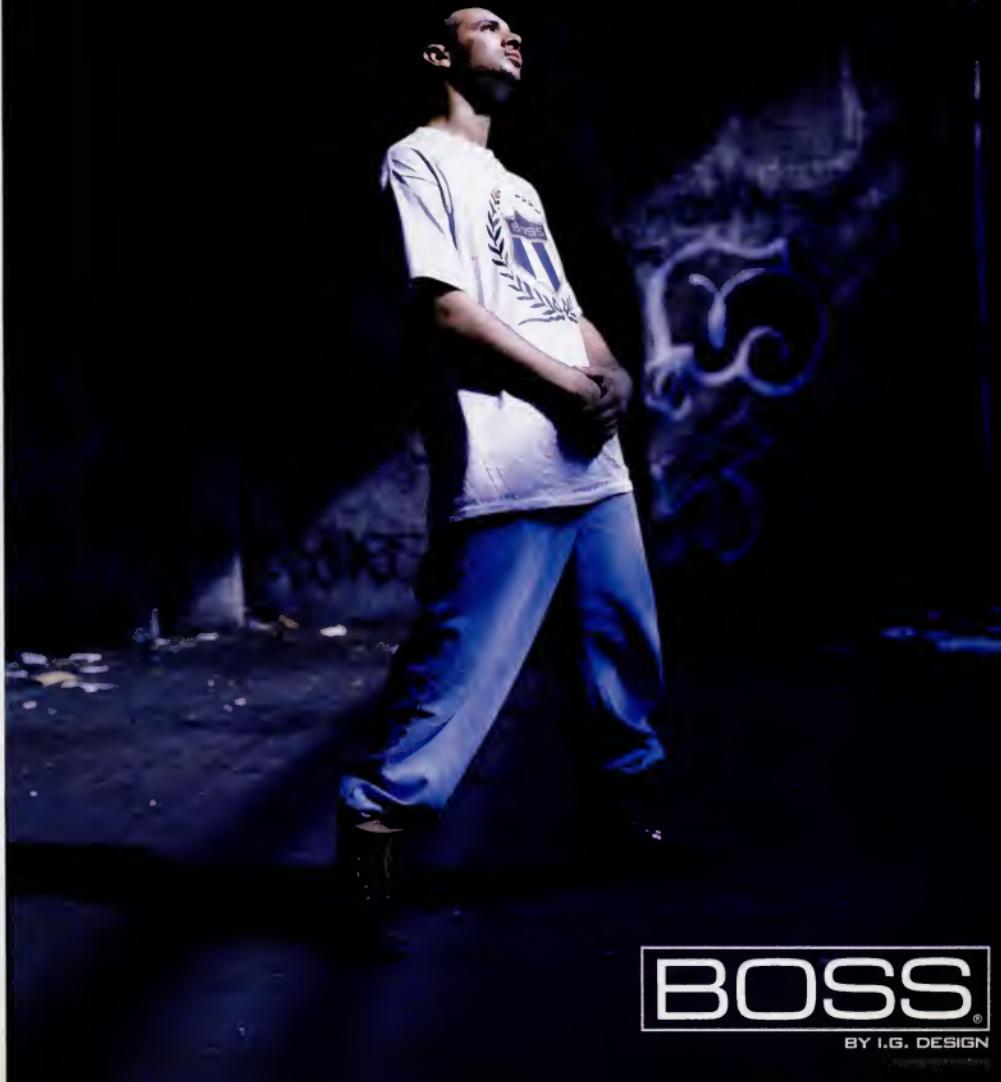
years before Guy came on the scene.

"As much as I know about dogs, I'm fascinated about learning from my puppies," Hall says. "I'm seeing them grow up—like they're my kids." And he won't part with his kids cheaply: A Neapolitan mastiff costs \$2,500, rottweilers go for \$1,800, American bulldogs \$1,500, and pit bull terriers as much as \$1,000. Teddy Riley recently bought a Neapolitan on the seat, and a dog in the back. If a thief approaches, he just says the word.

Hall believes he's "the dopiest dog trainer" and charges \$6,000 to teach people how to command their animals. His own canines are trained in German—"so black motherfuckers won't know what I'm saying." He says with a smile that for attack dogs to be perfected, "they need real things to do. I've seen guys [physically] fighting with girls, and I'll send my dog to break it up." Hall's even gone as far as leaving his car running, windows down, money on the seat, and a dog in the back. If a thief approaches, he just says the word.

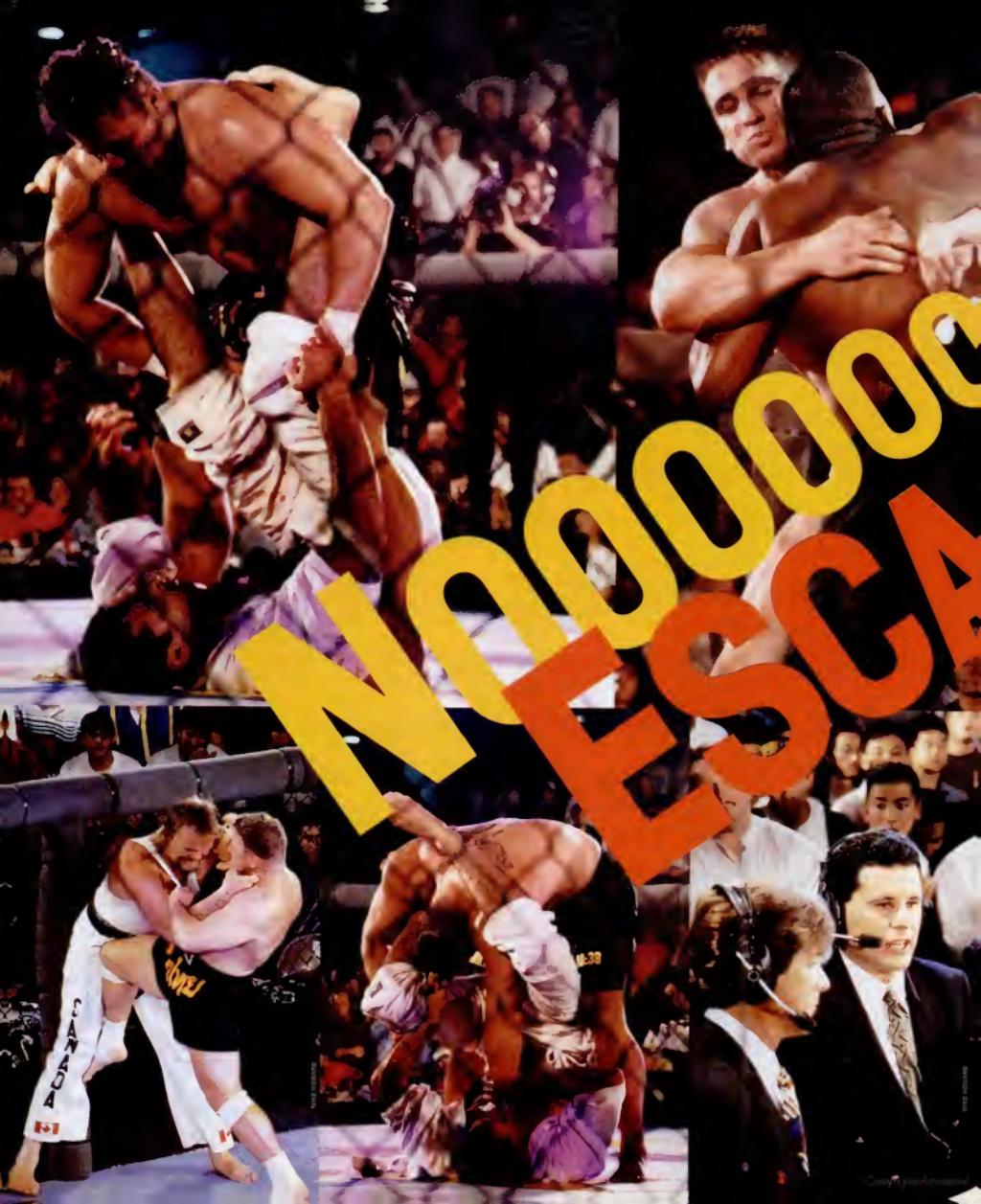
As far as the persistent rumors of a Guy reunion, Hall says there will be one, but when is anybody's guess. In the meantime, he's content with the success of *The Truth*, which he considers a "B+ album." If he goes on tour, he'll take two dogs—Princess Gangsta Bitch (in bed with Aaron above) and Ghost—with him. "Singing is a hobby to me," he says, "but raising dogs is a love."

Mimi Valdés

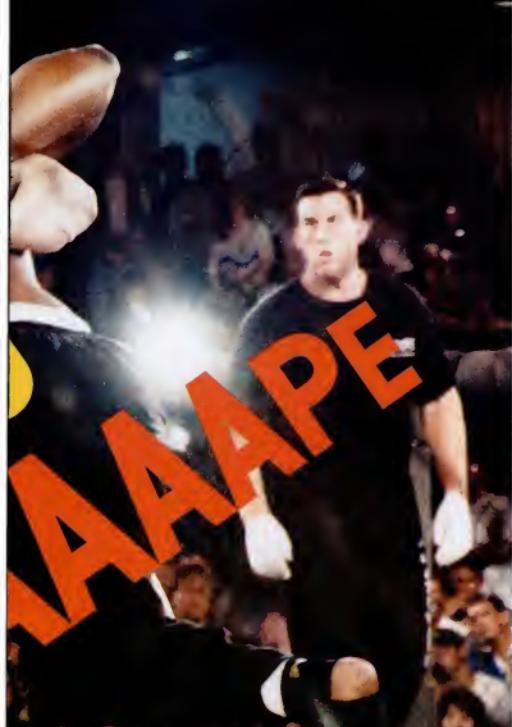


BOSS
BY I.G. DESIGN

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M00000
ESCA



Busting heads at the Ultimate Fighting Championship.

By Nathaniel Wrice

The blond kenpo fighter lunges at the six-foot-eight, 616-pound self-proclaimed sumo wrestler—"the largest professional athlete in the world"—with a tiger-claw strike across the temple that knocks him sideways off his feet. No, this isn't Mortal Kombat or an even more violent video game; we're at the third installment of the Ultimate Fighting Championship.

The withering blow ignites the more than 2,000 people packed into a concrete gymnasium in Charlotte, N.C. They seem astonished that they are actually going to see some action for the \$100 per couple they've spent on this unusual Friday-night date.

UFC matches are promoted as no-holds-barred, bare-knuckle, do-or-die elimination matches between masters of various martial arts—a modern-day Roman Colosseum complete with slo-mo instant replay. Two men enter a 30-foot-wide octagonal cage known as "the pit"; minutes later, one walks away and the other gets carried out. No clock, no points, no weight classes, no rounds, no rules, and as the TV ads promise, "Nooooooo escaaaaaape!"

So, you may be wondering, are these guys for real, or is this just another American Gladiators-meets-Wrestlemania song and dance? The answer is, a little of both. Though the promoters drone away about "reality-based combat," there are, in fact, fines to discourage biting and eye gouging, as well as a liberal dose of smoke, colored lights, and good old-fashioned hype. The pit was designed by John Milus, who cowrote the screenplay for *Apocalypse Now* and directed such slaughter flicks as *Red Dawn* and *Conan the Barbarian*.

Though insurance rates are down after the relatively light carnage of UFC II (some severe contusions), news outlets like CNN find the spectacle irresistible. "A human cockfight," they chuck, replaying the most cringe-inducing sequence, in which kick boxer Patrick Smith brings his elbow down on a hapless combatant's face three too many times. *A Current Affair* milked the story with a telephone poll; 66 percent of callers said the fights should be banned. A growing number of boxing commissions agree; only a handful of states permit this sort of barely regulated blood sport. But a scolding press is the promoters' best friend. When the New York *Daily News* called the last pay-per-view bout "the bloodiest, most barbaric show in history," UFC printed the quote on the package of their videotape.

The promoters claim that more than 100,000 households paid \$14.95 each to watch the fights live on pay-per-view in September, supposedly double the numbers for the first UFC in November 1993. Of course, these numbers may be grossly exaggerated, since there is no way of independently confirming pay-per-view viewership. Still, the promoters seem to be onto something: From the Shao Lin imagery of Wu-Tang Clan to Shaquille O'Neal's new hip hop/karate alter ego, Shaq-Fu, "the arts" are enjoying a surge in popularity not seen since the days of Bruce Lee.

The combatants who mix it up in the pit are neither actors nor killers. The appeal of UFC lies in combining the blood lust of unsanctioned "tough guy" competitions with the convenience and glitz of pay-per-view. "I don't want anyone to die," said McLaren before the last show. "It might be good for the buy rate, but I don't want anyone to die."

The undefeated star of the first two championships was Royce Gracie, a modestly built, six-foot-one, 180-pound Brazilian jiu-jitsu champion who calmly eliminated a succession of much larger fighters. Many confused fans, looking for Van Damme-style flying kicks, booed as Gracie took his victims to the floor, wore them out with kidney punches, then bent their arms backward until they gave up. The increasingly bored audience even chanted "Wedge! Wedge!" when one fighter's underwear was exposed during a momentary stalemate.

In the UFC III finals, Gracie was expected to meet Ken Shamrock, a Californian who is one of Japan's best and most charismatic shoot fighters (practitioners of a kick-boxing-and-judo hybrid that prohibits punches to the face). But the showdown was not to be.

In his first match, Gracie easily took down Kimo, a hulking third-degree tae kwon do black belt with JESUS tattooed in five-inch-high letters across his torso. But somehow Kimo managed to get back up—twice. If not for his ponytail, which Gracie pulled for dear life while taking blows from above, Kimo might have prevailed. Though he finally won, Gracie left the ring so dizzy and bloodied that he didn't fight again. Once it became clear that Gracie wouldn't continue, Shamrock examined his messed-up knee and decided not to continue fighting either.

The \$60,000 champion ended up being ninja Steve Jemmum, an Omaha city patrolman who pounded 36-year-old ex-bar bouncer Harold Howard (a former heavyweight jiu-jitsu champion) so hard that his jaw had to be wired shut. Howard did it himself, by the way, with metal garbage-bag twist-ties, although there was a fight doctor on hand.

The next day, 10 young fans from Tokyo gathered in Shamrock's hotel lobby. He was flanked by two ripped Japanese in \$800 cowboy boots. One fan finally asked, apologetically, "Shamrock-san, why did you not continue in the final fight?"

Shamrock drew a deep breath. "It's very hard for me, but... I don't want to fight in the UFC again. I don't want to fight in a contest that's not made for people to finish.... I had the judo guy up against the fence—I was punching him. I could see his eyes. I could see people taking pictures. I asked myself, Why? For money, for the Ultimate Fighting Championship? It didn't feel good. I cannot punch somebody unless I have a reason." □



KNUCKLEHEDZ
"These guys are heroes," says football hero-turned color commentator Jim Brown (with hat). "It takes a real champion to step into this ring."



IN THE COMFORT ZONE

She's conquered Broadway, Billboard, and a bad reputation, but Vanessa Williams is saving the best for last.
By Christian Wright. Photographs by Ruven Afanador

There's a hot new Spider Woman on Broadway," proclaim the television commercials. "Vanessa Williams is sensational." But on this early September afternoon, three flights above the dirty sidewalks of West 48th Street—just off Broadway—Vanessa Williams is exhausted. She's been working on her third album, *The Sweetest Days*; doing eight performances of *Kiss of the Spider Woman* a week; and commuting home to Westchester County every night. The better part of this day's been spent with Babyface here at Right Track Studios, where she's been voicing his vengeful, Latin-inflected song "Betcha Never." While the tech guys are mixing in the studio and the percussionist adds a few finishing flourishes, Williams is in an outer room, slumped in a black leather sofa watching *Opera*.

This is nobody's image of the diva in downtime. Her long, golden brown hair is pulled back into a plain ponytail; her Caribbean blue green eyes are naked and bleary; her legs are splayed beneath an ankle-length black jersey dress. She's wearing sneakers. There's no limousine out front, no minions doing her bidding, no tiptoeing around. In fact, she and Babyface have ordered their own takeout: something with rice.

When she speaks, her voice is deep, but her tone is flat and matter-of-fact. There's barely a trace of the lush, sweetly soulful vocals that made her ballad "Save the Best for Last" No. 1 on *Billboard's* pop charts in 1992 and sent her last album, *The Comfort Zone*, beyond platinum. Nor is there evidence of the dramatic belt that holds audiences rapt during "Come," one of several showstoppers in her Broadway debut. Which isn't to say that Williams is some kind of shrinking violet, or that in person she's a shadow of her public persona. She's just improbably regular. As her dresser at the Broadhurst Theater says (and who'd know better than a dresser?), "She's honestly very down-to-earth."

What brought Vanessa Williams down was, of course, what she calls "the first great '80s scandal." In 1983 she won the Miss America pageant, becoming the first black woman ever to be crowned. "We're talking 11 years ago," says Williams. "It still amazes me that there hadn't been a black Miss America before then, which is pretty primitive. In '83 you'd think we were pretty progressive, but I guess we weren't."

Yet even before the infamous *Penthouse* spread was published, her title had become a burden. From the black community, she says, "I got a lot of support, initially." Ed Eckstine, president of Mercury Records and Williams's executive producer, remembers his mother watching the pageant and hearing her voice ringing down the hall, "The black girl won! The black girl won!" But there was resentment too. "A lot of people thought I wasn't representative of a true African-American since I didn't have dark eyes and dark hair, and wasn't brown-skinned. So there was a division. It was hurtful to me initially, because this is the way I was born. These are the eyes I was given, and this is the hair color that I was given. I don't enhance it. You know, my son [Devon, now almost two] has the same color. So that was hurtful. That, and the death threats from the KKK."

Death threats?

"I had a whole FBI file of people who said they were going to kill me and kill my parents," says Williams. "They sent pubic hair through the mail and stuff like that. It was a heavy time in my life." She was 20 then. She'd grown up in the sheltered, predominantly white suburb of Millwood, N.Y. and had only entered the pageant because she needed money for her junior year of college. Her scholarship at Syracuse University, where she'd been studying musical theater, had run out. "I never even thought I'd win all the way," she says. "I mean, I knew

COME AS YOU ARE
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I had the talent and the intellect to win" (and, of course, the looks). Nevertheless, thanks to whatever combination of attributes, Williams found herself abruptly transformed into a symbol of an American ideal—one that she had not fully sorted out for herself. "All of a sudden," she says, "my political views meant something. At that point, I didn't even know what I felt politically. Two months into it, I said, This is enough, this is ridiculous. I mean, I wasn't running for president."

But she didn't quit. She carried on with her Miss America duties—tedious events at which she kissed babies and signed autographs—until *Penthouse* ran some nude photos of her that, as the *New York Times* reported, "simulate sexual relations with another woman." After her freshman year at Syracuse, Williams had taken a summer job as a "receptionist/makeup artist" for a photographer in Westchester. He'd pestered her all season to pose for some pictures, which he assured her no one would ever see. A little over a year later, she was crowned Miss America, and he sold the photos behind her back. "So I got burned by somebody who I thought was cool," she says now, with a curious detachment. Uncooler still was the pageant's executive director, who demanded that she resign in name of "traditional American values."

The irony is that today Vanessa Williams is one of the few Miss Americas anyone can name. And her life is the very embodiment of traditional American values. The defrocked beauty queen might have turned up years later, hawking skin cream on some cheesy late-night

to Angela Bofill, to funk, to the stuff Shep Pettibone used to play on "BLS. I said, 'It feels like we're on a track here.'" Eckstine decided to risk signing her, but before they could release her first album, she became pregnant. "We had a year's incubation period," says Eckstine, "both literally and figuratively."

When it finally came to putting together *The Right Stuff*, they knew more about what they didn't want than what they did. "We didn't want to be disposably dancy or 'Here She Is, Miss America'—the exploitation of all that," she says. They were also having trouble finding good material. "For the first record," says Williams, "we virtually had no songs given to us. So we had to beg, borrow, and steal to get any kind of material." Nevertheless, *The Right Stuff* (released in 1988, featuring two songs from Rex Salas, who's now Janet Jackson's musical director) was ultimately embraced by black radio and went gold, earning Williams some street credibility and three Grammy nominations. Pop radio, on the other hand, was still introducing her as Vanessa the Undress.

Three years and another child later, *The Comfort Zone* would shut the morning-zoo animals up. It had everything: "a dancye vibe, a jazz vibe, a ballady vibe," as Eckstine puts it. It also showed her singing voice—soulful and seductive in a 1940s lounge-singer kind of way—better than the less sophisticated material on *The Right Stuff*. The first single, "Running Back to You," hit No. 1 on the R&B and dance charts. "Save the Best for Last" luxuriated at the top of *Billboard's* pop, R&B, and Adult Contemporary charts for five weeks. All the while, Williams

is completely without self-doubt.

"Do I amaze myself?" she says with a sudden laugh. "Well, the fact that I'm 31 years old and starring in a Broadway show with my name at the top of the marquee is pretty incredible." When she took over the starring role in *Kiss of the Spider Woman* from the Tony Award-winning Chita Rivera in June 1994, her run was supposed to last until the end of the summer. It's since been extended until the end of January 1995. The sight of Vanessa strutting around in a bikini-like yellow-harness-and-feathers affair must be worth the price of admission. But bare gams alone don't explain her success.

When she sings, her voice fills the theater, ringing with tender sympathy or booming with sexy menace. As Vincent Canby wrote in the *New York Times*, "Her stage manner is both playful and aloof. She's not a performer who holds back. She's throwing everything she has into the performance.... In the way the role worked for the incomparable Chita Rivera, Aurora [the Spider Woman] is now rewarding the gorgeous Vanessa Williams." She's also boosted ticket sales, according to *Spider Woman* producer Garth Drabinsky, by as much as \$100,000 a week, or 20 percent of potential. "She has her own following," Drabinsky noted in September. "Obviously, she's appealing to a younger audience than Chita did and to a black audience. Somewhere around a third of the audience now is black; the percentage was negligible before."

But *The Sweetest Days*—from the electric-guitar-driven "Higher Ground" to "Love Is," which also appears on the *Beverly Hills, 90210* soundtrack—is hardly a traditional

VANESSA IN BIKINI AND FEATHERS IS WORTH THE PRICE OF ADMISSION. BUT BARE GAMS ALONE DON'T EXPLAIN HER SUCCESS.

infomercial. Instead, she's married to Ramon Hervey (whom she hired as her publicist during the chaos of her Miss America dethroning), has three children (Melanie, seven; Jillian, five; and Devin), bakes cakes, and drives a Range Rover to Browne meetings. And then, of course, there's her brilliant career.

Heris a story of redemption—if not revenge—topped, perhaps, only by the recent, stunning comeback of Marion Barry. Granted, he's overcome a crack conviction and a disastrous last term as the mayor of Washington, D.C.; she only had to distance herself from a mistake of late adolescence and the humiliation of a tamished tiara. But it's no news that women are held to a different standard in America. She was supposed to make her Broadway debut in 1984, replacing Twiggy in the Gershwin musical *My One and Only* with Tommy Tune, but Ira Gershwin's wife, Lee, nixed the idea, fearing Williams would attract the wrong sort of audience.

That same year, she began pursuing a recording career in earnest. Plenty of industry people agreed to see her but, she says, so they could say they'd met the scandal of the month. She'd been talking to Prince and doing some work with George Clinton, but nothing much seemed to be happening. Finally, in 1986, Hervey introduced Williams to his good friend Ed Eckstine, who at the time was starting up a new label, Wing, at PolyGram. Eckstine had heard Williams sing on the George Clinton hit "Do Fines Go With That Shake?" He was intrigued enough to meet her over dinner.

"I was surprised she was as musical as she was," says Eckstine. "But as she was raised in New York, listening to black radio. She knew everything from seminal hip hop

to Angela Bofill, to funk, to the stuff Shep Pettibone used to play on "BLS. I said, 'It feels like we're on a track here.'" Eckstine decided to risk signing her, but before they could release her first album, she became pregnant. "We had a year's incubation period," says Eckstine, "both literally and figuratively."

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"black" R&B album (whatever that is). "The point of entry is obviously on the R&B side," says Eckstine. "But as she matured, we knew the dancey stuff would take a back-seat. Her tastes would be more reflected. This is more jazzy, not as much clutter." In fact, "Sister Moon" (written by Sting, who also sings backup on the track), with Williams's smoky voice against horns and an upright bass, is practically a lounge number. Babyface, who wrote and produced two of the cuts, was inspired by *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, especially by what Williams calls "the cigarette-holding songs."

"I saw that she was taking a left turn," says Babyface, who is now managed by Ramon Hervey. "She's in a place where she can experiment. She doesn't have to deliver the up-tempo R&B. So I wrote one, 'Betcha Never,' that is very Spanish [Williams calls it 'Senorita with an attitude'], and the other, 'You Can't Run,' is kind of tropical. They both feel ethnic, but not southern-grits ethnic."

Vanessa Williams can't be troubled by such categories anymore; she has crossed too many boundaries for that. Her musical competition is now less the pop soul of Whitney Houston and Mariah Carey than, perhaps, the stage-injected pop theatrics of Barbra Streisand and Bette Midler. Heady company, particularly for a woman who once seemed destined to become merely the answer to a pop culture trivia question.

"It's easier now," she says over a cup of tea just before her 8:00 curtain. "The avenues have been opened." But there's something more to her success: More than just blowing up or realizing her dreams, she's tasted sweet redemption. At long last, Vanessa Williams the Jest has been eclipsed by Vanessa Williams the Best. □

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KILLS BUGS DEAD
Craig "Knowledge" Irving,
Mary Ann "Mecca" Vieira, and
Ishmael "Butterfly" Butler



BACK LIKE DAT

With the release of Blowout Comb, Digable Planets drop the hepcat pose and get back to the roots. By Kevin Powell

Here is my life," says the soft-spoken Ishmael "Butterfly" Butler, 25, rapper/creator of Digable Planets. He's standing in the apartment he shares with his four-year-old daughter in Afro-chic Fort Greene, Brooklyn, home also to Spike Lee, Rosie Perez, and Joshua Redman. His 'fro is untamed and his goatee is bushy. Some 2,000 records—mostly jazz and funk—carpet the living room, while books (Mao, Marx, existentialist philosophy, and black history) fill a wall unit. "I don't like this business," he says, meaning the music industry. "It doesn't have anything to do with art. Can Digable just live in and start making wack songs?"

Making wack songs is not what Ishmael had in mind when he first came up with the idea of Digable Planets, which would be a communal clan of poet/rappers dropping bebop bombs. The trio—Ishmael, Mecca, and Knowledge—debuted in 1993 with the ambitiously titled album *Reachin' (A New Reification of Time and Space)*. On the strength of a phat Art Blakey loop and a stylish, MTV-friendly video, the single “Rebirth of Slick (Cool Like Dat)” went gold (as did the album), and Digable snagged the Grammy for Best Rap Performance by a group. Journalists called them beatniks and quirky bohemians, while some in the hip hop community dissed them after the Grammy win, saying they were wack, questioning whether they were really even rappers, and asking sarcastically, “Cool *what*?”

"You know that's an establishment award," says Ishmael, who calmly concedes that Dr. Dre's Grammy-nominated album, *The Chronic*, was better than DP's. "But," he says, as if speaking directly to their critics, "you don't bring down somebody else." As for their image, he admits that "there were definitely things we should *not* have done—like the *Details* cover." The petite, Brazilian-born Mecca (a.k.a. Ladybug, a.k.a. Mary Ann Vieira), 21, adds her two cents a little angrily: "You know what? None of those people who criticized us make *Diabolique*. Planets who we are."

Though they don't call him the leader, it is Ishmael, ultimately, who makes the Planets what they are. His sensibilities were shaped by his parents' activities in the civil rights movement, his dad's jazz collection, and a stint at the University of Massachusetts, which he says he "flunked out of." He thought up the Digable concept when he was an intern at the semilegendary New York hip hop label Sleeping Bag Records in the mid-1980s.

Before meeting Ishmael, dreadhead Philadelphia native Knowledge (a.k.a. Doodlebug, a.k.a. Craig Irving) was a popular college radio DJ who "knew everyone" at Howard University (the school that also produced Shai, Mc'Shell (Ndeg'Occello, and Michael Ivey of Bashead). While in D.C., Knowledge got down with the Five Percent Nation of Islam (a loose religious sect spun off from the Nation of Islam)—although he never joined—and later met Mecca, who was writing poetry, rapping, and dancing with local groups. They became friends, and when Knowledge returned to Philly, Mecca moved there too.

Meanwhile, Ishmael had moved to Philly because cash was tight. Living with his grandmother, Ish worked odd jobs and made his way around the local music scene. When he met Knowledge—who was a part of the rap group then known as Dread Poets Society and now called the 7 OD's—the two vibed right away.

"I introduced Mecca to Ish, and we would hang out and talk about rap all the time," says the visibly shy Knowledge, who now manages the 7 OD's. Upon forming Digable, the three moved in together—first in Jersey City, then in Brooklyn. They went through what they call a "hustling period," then got signed to Pendulum/Elektra and came out with *Reachin'*. Two years later, they're back with *Bloomsday Comb*.

If the new album sounds like DP are going through an identity crisis, that's only half true. They haven't gone so far as to kill, then reinvent, themselves, as De La Soul did after their pop success. Instead, *Blowout Comb* goes to the roots, so to speak. About 60 percent of the disc feature five instruments: heavier bass, guitar solos, cellos, drums, congas. It's not as self-consciously jazzed-up as *Reachin'* was, and while last time the nationalist sentiments in their lyrics were draped in symbolism, this time they just say what they wanna say about blackness. In search of a street rep, they even pass the mike to Guru of Gang Starr and Jeru the Damaja. Best of all, on this album Isha, Mecca, and Knowledge rarely use the "bug" names. "The label says this record may offend some of our old fans," Ishaad says, untroubled.

The best thing you can say about Digable Planets is that they operate on their own terms, which is, after all, the essence of hip hop. "The whole meaning of Digable Planets," says Mecca, "is sticking together to get ahead. Not just for selfish reasons, but to be an example of unity. That's what we *got* to represent." □



ROSHUMBA

Natural-born beauty

In the unbreakable world of fashion, one Sister Long Legs has defied the odds by prancing onto the scene with a happy natural. But what would you expect? With a name like Roshumba "Beautiful" in Swahili, "she says the five-foot-ten-inch bronzing was destined for deliverance. "I'm very proud of the fact that in my seven years in the business, I have paved the way for other black models with naturals to be successful," she says. What's more important for her now, though, is her next step. "I'm not only going to be that 'black model with the Afro,'" says Roshumba. "I'm going to be that black actress with the Afro!"

This month 25-year-old Roshumba is appearing in Robert Altman's *Prêt-à-Porter*, a take-no-prisoners send-up of the fashion biz starring Kim Basinger and Lauren Bacall. Roshumba plays herself next to Forest Whitaker's flamboyant design divy, Cy Bianco (a character modeled after the Paris-based designer Xüly-Bet). "We just run around spoofing on ourselves," she says, laughing.

But Rosshuma's taken her acting career so seriously, it's hard to call this cameo her acting debut. For the past year she's trained with acting coach Marilyn Fried (who's coached other models turned actresses Isabella Rossellini and Veronica Webb), and her many television hosting and correspondent segments—ranging from *ET's* *Shades: The Dark Side of the Runway* to *Comedy Central's* *Short Attention Span Theater*—have been good practice for the supermodel's segue to Tinseltown. For now, though, her skills—that-pay-the-bills modeling career takes precedence.

keeping it all together is a spiritual trip—which Roshumba says began in her childhood with her three brothers and two sisters. "I grew up very grounded," says the Chicago native. "My granddad founded the Baptist church we attended as kids. My whole life revolved around the ladies with the big hats, the ministers, the gospel choir." In fact, it was those ladies with the big hats who urged the skinny, tall, and piggy teenager to go to Paris and become a model. Little did they know she'd blow up and popularize the happy-to-be-nappy look. Now the natural-bomb beauty says she just needs a natural man. "Give me a deep, dark, double Dutch, super-duper, chocolate black brother any day of the week," she laughs. "I have such a crush on Wesley Snipes." So do but from the aspiring startlets, no doubt. But from the runway to the silver screen, Roshumba knows how to get a *lenou* on the competition.

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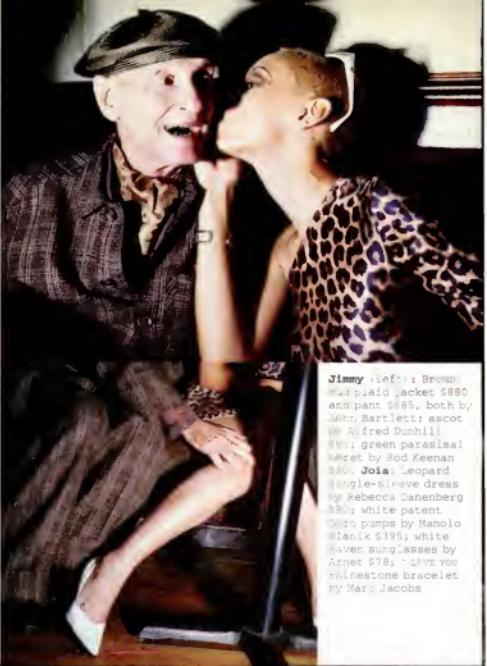


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Photographs by Geoffroy de Boismenu



Claudia (left): **W**hether dress and net shawl, both by Vivienne Westwood; black patent heels by Vivienne Westwood \$225; necklace by Renée Lewis.
Spencer: Brown velvet jacket \$2,000, wool pant \$510, and silk dress shirt \$910, all by Giorgio Armani; pyramid necklace by Renée Lewis

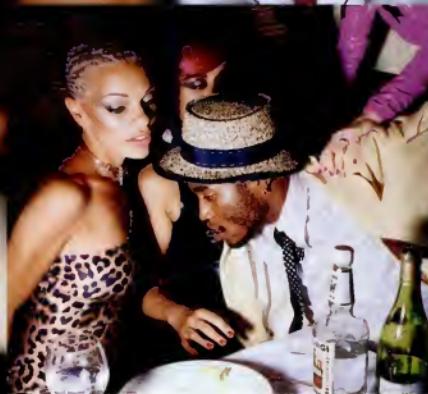


Jimmy (left): Brown
red plaid jacket \$880
and pants \$485, both by
Jen Bartlett; ascot
by Fred Buhill
\$75; green paisley
scarf by Rod Keenan
\$45. **Joia**: leopard
single-sleeve dress
by Rebecca Danenberg
\$380; white patent
toe pumps by Manolo
Blahnik \$395; white
satin sunglasses by
Arnet \$78; "I LOVE YOU"
ilestone bracelet
by Marc Jacobs



T'ning (right):
Leopard sleeveless
dress by Jeffrey
Costello \$250;
necklace by Marc
Jacobs





Lopel (top): Satin suit by Dolce & Gabbana \$1,015; satin shirt by William Beranek \$145; maroon silk tie by Thierry Mugler \$115

(Bottom, left to right) **Hiram**: Black viscose cardigan by Front Home Tech \$200; black dress shirt \$250, tie \$145, both by Comme des Garçons; tie tack by David Donahue \$32.50; LOSER necklace by Vass Ludacer \$220. **Fred**: Pastel wool/cotton crepe jacket \$495 and pant \$260, both by William Beranek; cotton dress shirt \$90 and tie \$48, both by Alberto Biani for New York; tweed Panama porcupine hat by Rod Hansen \$180. **Roberto**: White cotton and silk jacket by Philosophy di Ferreri \$1,260; Marci Estendereder jacket \$1,411 by Yohji Yamamoto N.Y.C.; lime shirt by so \$220; tie by Alberto Biani for New York \$48; aviator glasses by Ray Ban \$95



Shawn: Navy pinstripe jacket \$950 and pant \$350, both by Ahmad Akkad; mesh silver polo shirt by SO \$185; silver Starbrite western hat by Rod Keenan \$260. **Rachel:** Vinyl pink trench coat by Rebecca Danenberg \$150; vinyl bra by Debra Marquit \$75







(Left) **Joia**: Leopard Single-sleeve dress by Rebecca Minkoff \$96; white Ray-Ban Sunglasses by Avon \$78; I LOVE YOU rhinestone necklace by Marc Jacobs. **Gary**: Lace-up wool vest \$360 by Thierry Mugler; brown striped viscose shift by Dolce & Gabbana \$340; tie by Alfred Dunhill \$95; upholstered bowler hat by Rod Keenan \$300

(Top right) **Andrew**: Band-collar dress shirt \$185 by Donna Karan Collection; black sheer sleeveless shirt by John Paul Gaultier \$1,295; red crystal necklace by Erickson Beamon \$270.

Tanya: Blue satin dress shirt with silver snaps by Dolce & Gabbana \$320; silver necklace by Paul Smith \$250. (Bottom right) **Zulema**: Green tweed cardigan, hot pants, and boots, all by Marc Jacobs





(Clockwise from top left) **Mickey:** Checked jacket \$530 and vest \$135, both by Katherine Hamnett; striped dress shirt by New Collection \$180; silk tie by Thierry Mugler \$155; sunglasses by Christian Roth.
Nasha: Black robe-cut coat \$1,945 and sequined glitter T-shirt \$229, both by Jean Paul Gaultier; "Jackie O." sunglasses by Yves Saint Laurent \$35.
Luciana: Black fish-tail rubber dress by Syren \$350. **Robin:** Lamé halter top \$125, lamé pantie \$40, and lace skirt \$250, all by Jeffrey Costello; ankle-strap heels by Frederick's of Hollywood \$48.
Voula: Black velvet 3/4 coat \$465, satin pajama pant \$285, and scarf vest \$195, all by ZENY; rhinestone cross necklace by Marie Ferré \$40.
(Center) **Lopeti:** Satin suit by Dolce & Gabbana \$340; satin shirt by William Beranek \$145; maroon silk tie by Thierry Mugler \$15; Air Max™ cm by Nike \$135

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LOOK

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**SHERYL
LEE
RALPH**

"When I first saw you," I said, "Oh my, that's a dream..." So goes a love song from *Dreamgirls*, the Broadway musical that made Sheryl Lee Ralph a star 13 years ago. This Dream Girl's dreams have continued to come true, through *Family Ties* television work, slightly funny turns in films like *The Distinguished Gentleman* and *Sister Act 2*, and two new movies being released this winter. *Love Knots* and *Witch Hunt*—in which she plays a coven of young witches with no magic, just a little *hocus pocus*—

Combining her own business savvy with her new role of doting mom, the Jamaican-born actress/singer has also become a children's fashion designer. "Clothes for little boys came in three different styles: duet, dualler, and duallest," says Ralph. "No pale pastels for my child." With the help of her import/export--specialist husband, Ralph found African fabrics that suited her ideas and looked sharp on two-and-a-half-year-old Estiene (whose name graces her company), and got to designing cluds that now sell through catalog and a selection of stores in the South.

Not that film sets and designer showrooms are the only places she mines her creativity. Ralph dreams of taking her chops back to the stage soon. "I like the immediacy of the live audience," she says, adding with a laugh, "all you need is the mike, and the diva." Tell us when, Miss Ralph, and we'll be there. *Scott Poulson*

Scott Poulton-Barker

LOOK

SHOOT: THE FUGEES

Text and photos by Lisa Leone

Director Max Melkin wants to take the Fugees (Lauren, Pras, and Wycleff) "back to their roots" in the video for "Vocab," their third single. The idea, he says, is to shoot the "Translator Crew" where they're from. Melkin combines a mix of black and white, color or Super-8 film that he's used for his and some other videos. And he takes the guys' Hurricane "Vocab" is for street lyrics, no gangster—strictly lyrics and poetry," says Pras. "Rap's too serious these days. I wanna add some superhero fun." In one scene that appears in the video, he even jumps from the second story of a building.

In another scene, there's a vacant lot on 144th Street with a single video monitor showing the Fugees in a cafeteria. "We used to sit in the school cafeteria bopping on the tables, just for the acoustics," says Lauren. "The guitar in the song ties back to folk music, since hip hop is modern-day folklore."

A rented rooster was used for the shoot. "In my native Haiti, the rooster oversees everything," laughs Lauren. "In the dawn," says Wycleff. In the cleared lot, surrounded by burned-out buildings, the Fugees perform in front of a 20-by-20-foot green chrome screen; documentary footage of the unrest in Haiti will be keyed in during postproduction.

Up town one block, a camera on a dolly and track follows the Fugees down the street. When this part of the shooting begins, everyone from the neighborhood shows up to offer their shout-outs. One four-year-old freaks the whole block with his dancing. At the end of the scene, Wycleff and the kids form a cipher and start to freestyle.

For a final touch, Melkin plans to type various Creole phrases over the video images with a computer. More vocab from the Translator Crew.

GEAR: BACKPACK VEST

Putting on a backpack is a snap. In fact, it's as easy as putting on a jacket—especially if it's an all-in-one number like Tommy Hilfiger's (\$38). The book bag (right) peels right off the back of the coat. Now, that's utilitarian.



Commons with painting



ART: DANIEL SIMMONS

Artist Daniel Simmons studied social work in college. But it wasn't until later, after a bout with drugs, that he started to take painting seriously—and really became a social worker. A child of the civil rights movement and a Black Panther as a teenager, Simmons says his social consciousness "became a part of my art."

While writer's-blocked on a novel called *I'm Moving to Wisconsin, Gamma Self Heroin to the Christians*, Simmons picked up a paintbrush and tried to express his ideas on canvas with abstract images influenced in part by his early LSD use. But he doesn't think drugs made him a better artist. "I'd paint and get high, but I found I was less creative," he says. "I wasn't as focused and clear; my colors were suffering."

Now, two years into recovery, Simmons, 40, divides his time between painting (his powerful abstract works can be seen on Fox's *New York Undercover*), mounting shows of his creations (like an exhibit at Manhattan's Thought Forms Underground in January 1993), counseling other recovering drug users, managing the career of his son, Redrum (of the horrorcore group Flatlinez; Simmons is also creative consultant for their upcoming Marvel comic book), and running Ruth Fine Arts (a company devoted to supporting art by minority artists). In the two years since he started showing—with his younger brother, Def Jam's Russell Simmons, as his patron—Simmons's art has been acquired by the likes of Eddie Murphy, Spike Lee, Robert De Niro, Naomi Campbell, and black art collectors Meredith and Gail Sirmans.

With all this activity, one wonders whether Simmons is somehow making up for lost time. "I'm spread a little thin," he says, "but my main focus is my art."

Scott Poulson-Bryant

POSE: CRYSTAL WATERS

Now that fashion models have invaded the world of music videos (look at Heavy D's "Nuttin' but Love" and Ill Al Skratch's "I'll Take Her"), why shouldn't singers flip the script? RuPaul gave you the parody; now Crystal Waters gives you the real thing. The singer—who has topped the dance charts with "Gypsy Woman" and "100% Pure Love"—recently signed a contract with Ford Models. Crystal walked in several European shows, and soon after, the agency threw her a debut party during the 1993 New York Spring Collections. Surely, though, Crystal's already gotten lots of lessons on how to work the runway from all those fashionable club kids at her performances. As RuPaul says, "You better work!"



ART: ESTHER MAHLANGU

Step aside, Queen Latifah: Esther Mahlangu is both queen and premier artist of the Ndebele tribe in the Transvaal province of South Africa. The traditional style she works in is characterized by geometric patterns that tell a story or commemorate a special occasion—and it's not practiced by everyone. "It is a woman's art," Mahlangu, 58, explains through a translator.

"My grandmother and my mother taught me. Now I teach my grandchildren." A vibrant symbol of Africa's womanhood, the designs adorn everything in the village—from clay pots and handmade crafts to the walls of homes and modern items like alarm clocks and double-edged razors.

Recently, the first lady of Ndebele design completed a three-story mural for the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C., in conjunction with the exhibit *Esther Mahlangu, South African Muralist: The BMW Art Car and Related Works*. The BMW art car she painted in 1991 made her the first woman—alongside artists like Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg—commissioned to lend her style to the luxury car's exclusive line. "It's just Ndebele design," says the artist nonchalantly. "My home is like this—outside and inside."

Kimberly A.C. Wilson



Stone on the set

VIDEO DIRECTOR OF THE MONTH: CHUCK STONE III

"When I was a child, my parents thought something was wrong with me because I didn't want to read," says Chuck Stone III. "I would rather watch cartoons than go to the library." Inspired by the wacky mayhem of Saturday morning cartoons and the spectacles of George Lucas's *Star Wars* epics, Stone has gone on to direct 36 music videos, mostly for hip hop songs. Of his influences, the 28-year-old closet metalhead says, "The Warner Bros. cartoons are my personal favorites. What makes those shorts so remarkable is the marriage of movement and music. It's that flow that I try to capture in my work."

Ever since his first video five years ago (*Living Colour's "Funny Vibe"*), Stone has consistently taken the medium to another level. Check the style and the credits: He's used everything from blurred, muted-color images of hoodlums bombing walls with aerosol art (*Artifacts' "Wrong Side of da Tracks"*) and 3-D animation *F/X* that make the image implode (*Black Sheep's "The Choice Is Yours"*) to a zany cardboard cutout of Elvis (*Living Colour's "Elvis Is Dead"*) and painstaking close-ups that pay tribute to the turntable as musical instrument (*the Roots' "Distortion to Static"*).

"The diversity of my experiences has influenced my work," says the Philadelphia native and Rhode Island School of Design graduate. "In my videos I like to show the artists in situations that most directors don't capture, even if it's just so-called ruffnecks laughing on the basketball court [in Neneh Cherry's "Sassy"]." Stone's offbeat style and close attention to craft have created a truly captivating cyberpunk vision. He's one videomaker who's not afraid to make a tooful, funny vibe or to turn reality on its head.

Michael A. Gonzales

LOOK

Treach's silver padlock and chain, Flavor Flav's gold teeth, and Mary J. Blige's platinum blond hair are street style staples. Soon you can add metallic clothing—like Heavy D's gold jacket (right)—to that list. This winter, fashion designers like DKNY, Versus, Dolce & Gabbana, Diesel, Manolo, Anna Sui, Richard Tyler, and Chanel are all going for the heavy-metal look.



'90s girls: Tye-V, Rochelle, Pam

TREND: METALLICA



Photo: JEFF PACHOUD/AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

HAIR: BLACKGIRL

Where the celebrities go, the rest of the world follows. Now that stars like Toni Braxton, Jada Pinkett, Me'Shell Ndegeocello, and Halle Berry have opted for short cuts, hair salons have been inundated with requests for the look Josephine Baker pioneered in the '20s. Blackgirl (Tye-V, Rochelle, and Pam), the latest entry in the girl-group sweepstakes with their debut album, *Treat U Right*, are out to make a statement with their hair. "I was the first one to have short hair," says Pam. "I wanted us all to have the same look. When you have short hair, it puts you out there."

The Atlanta-based singers get their 'do done at New York's Hair I Am, which specializes in black women's hair. They get an overhaul every six weeks, plus constant touch-ups. Tonight they will each endure three hours in the chair for a relaxer, conditioner, color (with cellophanes), cut, and polish. "Lots of girls are cutting their extensions off," says Wayne, their stylist, who has a weave. "It's bold and sophisticated."

In the salon, munching on fried chicken, having their nails done (hot pink), and watching themselves on TV performing with Chuck Berry on *The Apollo Theater Hall of Fame*, the trio is screaming with delight. "I dress up for my hair," says Rochelle, on break from the dryer. "But you have to be careful; you can't be too wrong."

And what do the ladies think? "Men always thought a woman had to have long hair to be sexy, but we're out to go against the grain," says Tye-V. "All I know is that before I got my hair cut, teenage boys used to try and pick me up. Now I meet grown men."

Kiki Mason

SURROUND



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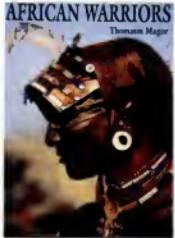


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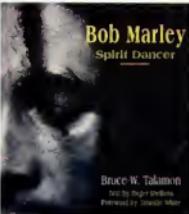
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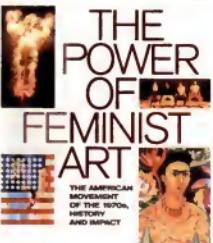
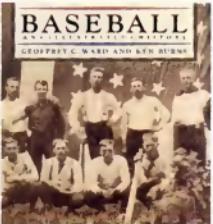


WORD: COFFEE-TABLE TALK

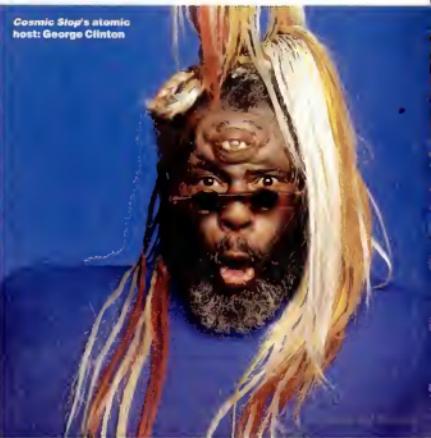
Never underestimate the power of pictures. Coffee-table books are a visual feast for anyone who appreciates the fact that the right image expresses more than words. Check out this menu:

Cyclops (Bulfinch Press) is a collection of Albert Watson's technically flawless and masterfully lit black-and-white photographs of Treach (from the first VIBE cover), Sade, Slick Rick, and Cab Calloway, as well as still lifes from Elvis's Graceland....In *African Warriors* (Abrams), Thomasin Magar presents an elegant anthropological tribute to the Samburu warriors of Kenya....*The Art of Makeup* (HarperCollins) is Kevin Aucoin's how-to manual with techniques applied to Naomi Campbell, Janet Jackson, and Whitney Houston....*Saturday Night Live: The First Twenty Years* (Houghton Mifflin) features a full-color retrospective of popular sketches, characters, musical guests, and trademark phrases that have appeared on the show....A range of essays and artwork in *The Power of Feminist Art* (Abrams) defines the feminist art movement of the '70s and its radical impact on the art world....*Nicknight* (Schirmer/Mosel) pulls together dazzling photographs by the master colorist Nick Knight, whose images resonated with what's been called an "elegance of despair"....Bruce W. Talamon and Roger Steffens present *Bob Marley: Spirit Dancer* (W.W. Norton), a candid visual record of the reggae superstar's life....A selection of Eugene Richards's harrowing, sometimes controversial photographs of small-town and inner-city people is compiled in *Americans We* (Aperture)....*Africa* (Little, Brown) is a black-and-white Herb Ritts portfolio celebrating the magnificence of Africa's wildlife, land, and people....Geoffrey C. Ward and Ken Burns, the creators of the acclaimed *Civil War* series, have produced *Baseball* (Knopf), a history of the game, with essays by notable enthusiasts and classic photographs.

Tierra Mukherjee



Cosmic Slop's atomic host: George Clinton



TUBE: COSMIC SLOP

The Mothership is landing at HBO, but George Clinton isn't the captain—he's the host. Filmmakers Reginald (House Party, Boomerang) and Warrington Hudlin are piloting *Cosmic Slop*, a trilogy of half-hour tables focusing on current social issues. Clinton serves as the ominous narrator, and of course, the show is named after one of his old jams. The Hudlin brothers describe their first foray into television as "a multicultural *Twilight Zone*."

"The *Twilight Zone* was great because the writing was great," Reginald says, "but more importantly, the episodes brought moral fables into people's living rooms each week. They made you think. That's what I want *Cosmic Slop* to do."

Reginald—a P-Funk and sci-fi fan—directed an episode called "Space Traders," in which aliens swoop down and make an offer that the president and his administration can't refuse: They'll solve America's environmental and domestic problems if they can take all the African-Americans away with them.

If "Space Traders" is any indication, the Hudlins are placing a premium on quality writing. The show is adapted from a short story in Derrick Bell's critically acclaimed book *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*. Trey Ellis (*Platitudes*; *The Inkwell*) wrote the teleplay.

Space Traders stars Robert Guillaume and is followed by two other promising stories. "The First Commandment," in which Warrington makes his directorial debut, features N.Y.C. Blue's Nicholas Turnuro in a tale about a religious icon coming to life in a poor Latino neighborhood. "Tang," a Chester Himes short story directed by Kevin Sullivan (*If Fly Away*), concerns a rifle that arrives mysteriously in a woman's apartment.

Welcome to the *Cosmic Slop* Zone.

Michael Datcher

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TUBE: REGGAE ON VIDEO

Tired of channel surfing from BET to MTV to VH-1 in search of slamming reggae videos? Then turn to your local cable and network stations, which are bursting with enough reggae to satisfy the fiercest music cravings:

• Four-year-old *Tropical Beat* (on cable and network stations nationwide; check local listings) is the grande dame of grass-roots reggae shows. Videos by classic groups like Inner Circle rub shoulders with those by dancehall and African artists. Host Charlene "Mona" Warner shows only clips with a positive vibe. "I don't advocate guns, shooting people, or sex for sex's sake," she says.

• *Caribbean Rhythms* (BET, Saturday, 3:00-4:00 p.m. and Sunday, 2:00-3:00 a.m.) features an eclectic mix of soca, zouk, world music, and adult-oriented reggae. Men will probably tune in for a glimpse of the bikini-clad hostess, Rachel Stuart, Miss Caribbean 1993. Says former executive producer Bille Woodruff, "It's the videos and it's Rachel. And we wanted to show her." And they do.

• *Rockers* (WNYE, New York, Sunday, 2:30-3:30 p.m.), with Earl "Rootsman" Chin, favors Bob Marley's conscious lyrics over Patra's seductive hip grinding. "Reggae is a music that educates, inspires, and identifies injustices," says Chin, who cut his teeth hosting a popular reggae radio show on the New York station WNWK in the late '70s. "Dancehall music is not doing that."

• *Video Dub Plate* (WNYE, New York, Wednesday, 11:00 p.m.-midnight) is riding dancehall's wave of popularity. The show features interviews with artists and videos cut and mixed like DJ tapes. "We're trying to give people the same vibe they get when they're listening to a sound tape," explains coproducer Joy "Essence" Lomena. "The music is smoothly mixed rather than throwing music videos together one right after another."

Vanessa Jones

LOOK

WORD: 'LILIANE: RESURRECTION OF THE DAUGHTER'

Ntozake Shange's latest book, *Lillian: Resurrection of the Daughter*, is her most brilliant and brave work to date. In her third novel, Shange tells the story of a woman who's defined by her own creative impulses. Yes, *Lillian* is dense and intense—filled with divine bohemian drama and highly effective erotica—but it's refreshingly mature and remarkably subdued.

The narrative follows the shy, introspective *Lillian*'s struggle for self-knowledge from her preteen days in Mississippi to her young-adult life in New York. Painting is the only outlet for her feelings. Her father is New York State's only black criminal-court judge, and she's remained Daddy's little girl. After listening to Stevie Wonder's *Songs in the Key of Life* in 1976, she's motivated to find her true self by uncovering the dormant voices buried inside her. In unravelling *Lillian*'s soul-searching, Shange deftly weaves together the conversations of *Lillian*'s past buddies and lovers, the sound of music (jazz, salsa, and soul), the spirit of contemporary African liberation struggles, the dialogue of her therapy sessions, and descriptions of her deeply personal artwork.

The result is a magical portrait of a committed artist/dreamer who's greater than the sum of her parts. *Lillian* is a rare in-depth story about the life experience of a courageous female soul. With it, Shange may well set herself alongside such writers as Toni Morrison and Isabel Allende—creators of poetic and historical tours de force that stay with the reader long after she's stopped reading.

—Ipeleng Kgositise



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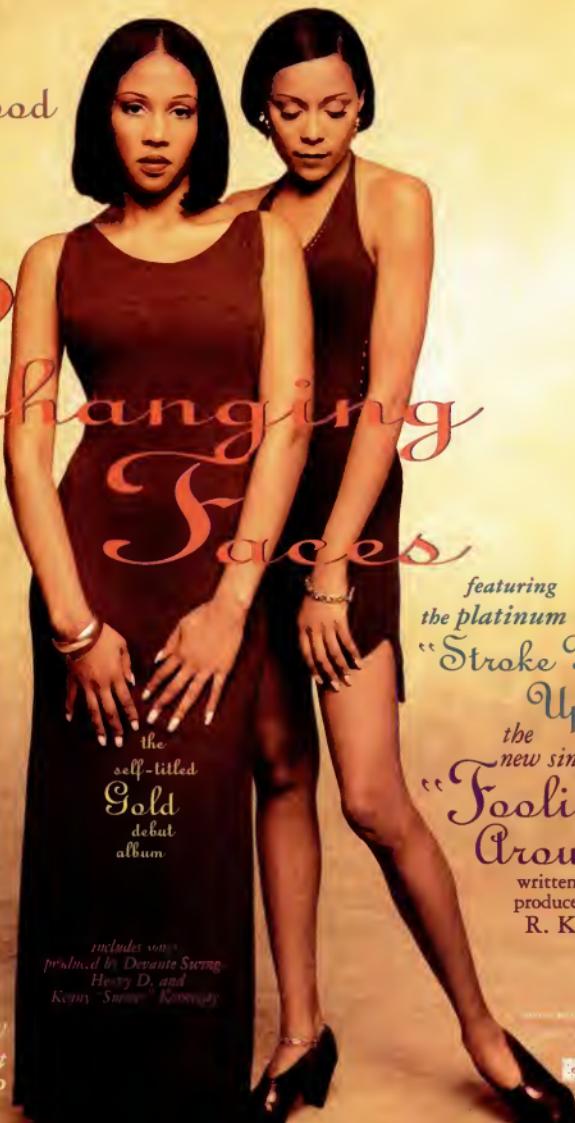
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REVOLUTIONS



SLICK RICK

Behind Bars • Def Jam

By Sacha Jenkins

Strong are the men who ride the wide ocean of hip hop. These beings reach for gold, diamonds, platinum, and pearls—always ready to trash anyone who dares call himself a hero. And hip hop's castaway consumers, who idolize these men, often inject Slick Rick into their daydreams.

From nose to tooth to chest, the eye-patched Ruler is as draped in finery as the Rockefeller Plaza Christmas tree. His cock-diesel gold vines are heavy with religious ornaments, zodiac symbols, and carefully wrought animals. His chains seem linked, meshed together as one, creating, as he does at his best, a collage of sight, sound, and language.

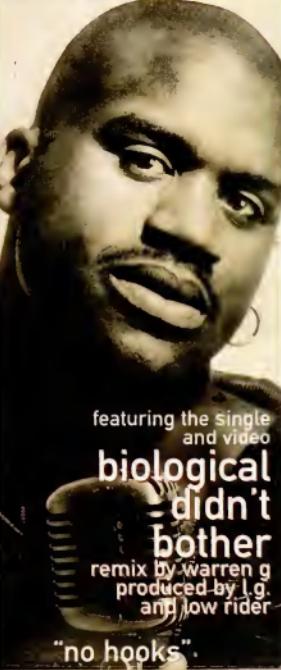
The flamboyant Slick Rick stands erect and proud behind the wheel of his vessel—plain and simple, a hip hop icon, one of the most sampled voices in music. His life is split between the personae of Ricky Walters, Slick Rick, and MC Ricky D. Each character's life and lyrics are

Out on ball: Slick Rick circa 1995

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breaking blow with
**shaq-fu:
da return**

his new album



featuring the single
and video
biological
- didn't
bother
remix by warren g
produced by l.g.
and low rider

"no hooks"

and

"newark"
/keith murray

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eric sermon, redman, warren g, k-cut,
def jef, shy skizzl and lg.
and low rider



wild, but each voice is tame. Lucky for Ricky Walters that while behind bars—and within *Behind Bars*—he's got two other people he can talk to.

Rick's early exploits (the ones he is still most famous for) were created in conjunction with former partner Doug E. Fresh and the Get Fresh Crew. Several classics resulted—including "The Show" and "La-Di-Da-Di"—before the two had a falling-out. Soon after, *The Great Adventures of Slick Rick* spread swashbuckling tales of explicit sex, ghetto love, and flat-out fantasy across the world. The British-bred MC (he lived there until he was 14) had an irresistible, supermild vocal pitch and an Old World accent with his hard-edged phrasing.

It wasn't all just lovely, though. Rick caught beef for his explicit lyrics and for his portrayals of women ("Lick the Balls," "Treat Her Like a Prostitute"). But better known to listeners was the compassionate Slick Rick, the one who came across as wise and broadly experienced. Songs like "Children's Story" and "Teenage Love," from *The Great Adventures of Slick Rick*, dealt sharply with the consequences of breaking the law and the processes of a romantic relationship.

The Ruler's Back was Slick Rick's second full-length effort, but unfortunately, its lyrical drama seemed to spring from Ricky Walters's real-life troubles. On July 3, 1990, Walters shot at two men—one of whom was his cousin—who, according to Rick, tried to take his jewels and cash stash. After a spill of blood and bullets, he led the police on a high-speed chase through the Bronx that ended when a frenzied Walters, along with his girlfriend, crashed into a tree. Soon after, Rick found himself locked down.

The Ruler's Back was completed while he was out on bail—thanks to Def Jam's own Poppa Doc, Russell Simmons—during a three-week, knock-'em-out-the-box-Rick marathon, in which Rick also filmed five music videos. Sadly, the album was produced solely by Slick Rick and DJ Vance Wright—unlike *The Great Adventures*, which had several talented producers. Myopic soundwise, it didn't work.

And curiously, the single "I Shouldn't Have Done It" had little to do with the pile of hot shit that Rick was knee-high in. Rick should have represented, and written about the actual events. He should have kept it real. Which he does on *Behind Bars*, recorded during the same three-week ses-

RICK'S STREET BRILLIANCE AND SPARKLING WIT CAN BE DISTILLED FROM BEHIND BARS.

sion that produced *The Ruler's Back*. An engaging hybrid of Rick's previous albums, *Bars* is a trek worth trippin'.

The title song (and first single) deals with Rick's prison experiences and is everything "I Shouldn't Have Done It" should have been. The Warren G remix is butta-fucco: misted sleigh bells, liquefied electric piano chimes, low-key drum snaps, and smartly sampled vocal hooks—all directly plugged in to that molten hot vault that stores MC Ricky D's lyrics.

In the ragga-grooved, bass-heavy "A Love That's True," Rick playfully chats about some of the ladies in his life: "Oh, you're tryin' to dig me / I can't figure it / Back in the days you used to smoke / Coke cigarettes," cries one of the several female "companions" whom Rick himself mutates into. The low-down-and-dirty scenarios kicked on this joint sound almost too damn specific to be fiction. And "Sittin' in My Car" is a beat-box-driven marvel—courtesy of Doug E. Fresh—served lover's style, splashed with a pinch of piano, and lined with Rick's quaint, in-the-shower-style crooning.

On the parole-friendly side of things, Rick offers the usual thoughtful, positive song. "All Alone (No One to Be With)" is the story of a virgin girl who succumbs to the grip of a young mack, gets pregnant, and is left to deal with the newborn by herself. Dry, slow, and sullen, the humming keyboards support Slick Rick's poetic lyrics well.

On the downside, though, tracks like "Cuz It's Wrong" (which paints yet another portrait of the Super-Groupie Slut) and "Get a Job" (an ode to leechlike friends) expose the tardiness of *Behind Bars'* release. You could get over with shit like this in '89, but not now—when hip hop, for better or for worse, dwells on gangsta-isms and weed-ed-out abstractions. And "Let's All Get Down" (featuring Nice & Smooth) was chill on the duo's *Jewel of the Nile*, but on Slick's album, it's a blemish—filler—that only draws attention to the lack of new material.

But considering the fact that the vocals were recorded three years ago, and that some tracks had to be remixed or completely developed around Rick's voice, and that the contents add up to more of an EP than an LP—in the end, the disc's vibrant personality shines through. It's been proved: Rick's legendary street brilliance and sparkling, charming wit can even be distilled from behind bars. He's pioneered a style, a station in hip hop history that no one can contest. Rick can compete with three-year-old rhymes in today's hip hop climate because he has always been so far ahead of his time.

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TERRY GANZIE

Heavy Like Lead • Profile

SLUGGY RANKS

Ghetto Youth Bust • Profile

The longest-running controversy in reggae pits socially conscious lyrics that wax revolutionary against pum-pum-slobbering, glock-toting, negative fluff. Too often, this overheated debate equates the roots sound of the '70s with "culture" and the dancehall sound that's dominated the past ten years with "slackness." *Heavy Like Lead* and *Ghetto Youth Bust* challenge this flawed logic, even if Terry "the Outlaw" Ganzie precedes an antigen tune with one urging backbiters to "give the Magnum a blow job," and Sluggy Ranks disses slackness on one track right before praising punniness on the next.

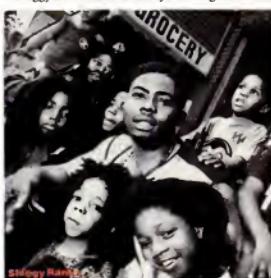
Since bursting out as a uniquely nasal antidote to busloads of Buju soundalikes in 1991, Ganzie has become a major DJ with a string of conscious, hardcore dancehall hits. Part of a Rastafari revival that can only be considered fundamentalist, Ganzie manages to be pro-woman and pro-family values, exhibiting masterful flow while taking the Old Testament literally: Respect your woman, yes, but think of her pregnant, cooking, and married.

On *Heavy*, fat bogle beats abound, thanks to the Penthouse Records crew, which is responsible for Buju's best work and Beres Hammond's astounding comeback. On the slow-thick side, "Send Them Come" and "King of Kings" wreak havoc on the Far East and tempo riddims. And happily, aside from the vaguely R&B-styled "Working Class," there are none of the pasty crossover attempts that are the post-Shabba curse of U.S. reggae labels.

Sluggy Ranks has had a longer, spottier career than Ganzie, providing occasional moments of genius like "Badness Nah Go Work" and "95% Black and 5% White." On *Ghetto Youth Bust*, rerecorded versions of his more dated sessions unite the production sound of another Kingston powerhouse, King Jammy's, with numerous excellent, contemporary lickovers of tried-and-true riddims.

Jamaican artists enjoy almost unlimited license to redo hits—their own and those of others—and Sluggy's tunes lose nothing in the updating. More in line with the "traditional" concept of reggae consciousness than Ganzie, the singer is at his best when trashing cops and the racial divide. But whatever he touches on, Sluggy's vocal style, a lilting lift from Barrington Levy and Little John, spreads sweet, sweet soul over the multilayered output of Jammy's computer.

Both of these albums are strong, unfiltered slices of dancehall at its best, even if Sluggy never achieves the lyrical heights Ganzie consistently exhibits. Both are



also, to an extent, greatest hits collections masquerading as new releases. Ganzie is one of the youngest artists to deserve such a retrospective, but Sluggy might benefit from having a few more legitimate hits under his belt, especially since *Ghetto Youth Bust* omits his biggest smash of late, "Sodom and Gomorrah"—presumably to avoid implication in reggae's other persistent controversy. *Richard Nixon*

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Breakdown

Hiccup slippin', Speed rappin',
Syllable smashin', backwards flowin',
and mind blowin'



In one of the creepiest scenes in Martin Scorsese's creepy King of Comedy, hysterical talk show host Masha, played by Sandra Bernhard, is babbling at Jerry Langford, king of the talk show hosts, played by Jerry Lewis. Masha and her psychotic fellow groupie Rupert Pupkin (Robert De Niro) have kidnapped Langford, and Masha's got him bound to a chair, his mouth taped. He's all hers now, her dream come true. She's stripped down to her underwear, and she thinks if she promises to let him go, he'll have sex with her and she can die happy.

She bounces up and down in her excitement. "I wanna be black!" she yelps. "I feel like putting on some Shirelles!" As this unbearable pas de deux breaks up, raising, as it does, profound questions of alienation, female abjection, and postmodern spectacle, I always find myself looking at Lewis's Jerry Langford—his eyes bleeding with loathing, hate, and disgust—and thinking the same thing: the poor sap! He probably doesn't even know who the Shirelles were!

The Shirelles were four black teenagers from Passaic, N.J.: Shirley Owens, Beverly Lee, Addie Harris, and Doris Coley. In 1957, inspired by the clarion call sent from New York City by Aretha Smith and the Chantels, the girls formed a junior high school singing group, the Poquillos. They even wrote songs. A school friend of the girls got the ear of her mother, Florence Greenberg, a 36-year-old white woman who, wanting to "get out of the house," had (of all things) started a record label called Tiaras.

By the end of 1957, the Poquillos were the Shirelles. By 1959, Tiaras was Scceptor. By 1960, the Shirelles were living in the Top 10. By the time the Beatles covered their "Boys"—no hit at all, but the Beatles knew what they liked—their future was set: oldies shows, failed solo careers, and endless repackagings. The latest is *The Very Best of the Shirelles* (Rhino), a disc that, even with 16 cuts, checks in at under 39 minutes.

The music remains exquisite—and in certain moods, the sexiest thing under the sun. If most early girl-group music can be summed up by the Chantels' song title "The Plea," the Shirelles were living in a new world. There was no pleading in Shirley Owens's voice. She might have asked questions—most famously in "Will You Love Me Tomorrow?"—but even her questions were declarations. As soon as she opened her mouth, she'd make up her mind.

There's no doubt that to hear a woman so plainly aware of her own mind and body—in "Tonight's the Night" (some of the most ecstatic music of its time)—was shocking in 1960. And the record still sounds daring today—though who's daring whom is an open question. Really, what boy could live up to what the girl who's singing this song expects to get? Like a sigh drifting down from the sky, strings hang a theme in the air for a long moment; a syncopated beat drops the sound snack into a single ringing guitar chord. And suddenly, "tonight"—as Bruce Springsteen once put it, turning a negative into an affirmation, running the sort of trick that works only in song—"all the promises will be broken." As the song goes on, the singer talks to herself, to the boy this song might thrill or terrify, to millions of people who are listening—and feels thrilled and terrified herself, all at the same time.

A Shirelles movie is in the works—or at the same time, a Florence Greenberg movie, with Bette Midler slated for the lead and En Vogue a possibility for the group. Who in the world, though, could play the boy "Tonight's the Night" leaves behind? Or the boy who, maybe, catches up with it?

Addie Harris died in 1982 of a heart attack. Today, if you pass a marquee with SHIRELLES on it, one of two groups might be performing, neither with Shirley Owens. The Shirelles' story has no real ending. Not as long as the music can move someone like writer/director John Sayles to name a film *Baby, It's You* and give it a life and a sense of loss he'll never match again. Not as long as the hearts in the Shirelles' sound remain so unsatisfied that a writer like Susan J. Douglas (a professor at Hampshire College and author of *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female With the Mass Media*) can hear in "Dedicated to the One I Love" and "Will You Love Me Tomorrow" "the tiniest seed of a social movement... a pop culture harbinger in which girl groups, however innocent and commercial, anticipate women's groups, and girl talk anticipates a future kind of women's talk."

Douglas can hear all that, not only because it's there but because the words the Shirelles' songs wished for, their paradise of lust and hope, is still missing.

Gril Marcus

Gril Marcus is the music columnist for Interview.





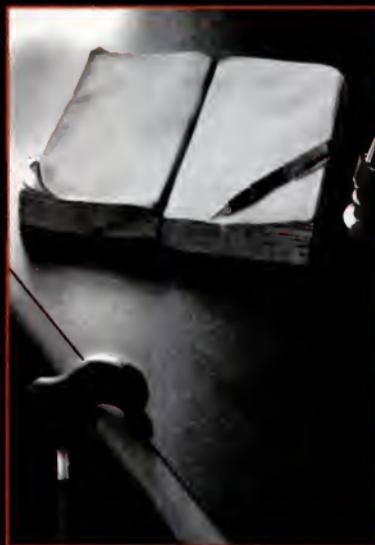
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SINGL E FILE

by James Hunter

The West Coast continues its smooth streak. It keeps popping out what RAPPIN' 4-TAY terms "something to roll to" on "Playaz Club" (Chrysalis/EMI/Rag Top), a sneaky burlesque of a world where success feels like working your toes on a mink rug. Even ostensibly real Cali anthems like ABOVE THE LAW's "Black Superman" (Ruthless) and the lesser "Kaliifornia" follow-up go for similar gratification; those old synth squeaks and sleigh bells against the funk still spell sensation. Meanwhile, from Nashville, BOOGIE, sounding just like Snoop, remembers a recently slain friend on "Shocked" (Relativity), while Chicago's COMMON SENSE slows down on "I Used to Love H.E.R." (Relativity), equating hip hop with his lost girlfriend who left him for L.A. and show biz. This struggle between Hollywood kicks and East Coast-style introspection ain't going away....More than a decade ago, when

BLONDIE's Debbie Harry swung into ray on "Rapture," the music managed an awesome intimacy. Forget the Sugartown-era vibe on K-Klass's new remix, where "Rapture" (Chrysalis/EMI) now lifts away on boldly unsentimental New York house shuffles, then, in a spectacular transition, eases into the rap with acid jazz brass. This mix sounds like brand-new music, where

Diddy's "Atomic" updates can't resist the phat, wry original Euro-disco; its hair is still beautiful....MADONNA and producer Dallas Austin's "Secret" (Maverick/Sire/Warner Bros.) will be many people's favorite Madonna record in years. In the first radio mix, Austin's single-note guitar mutterings sound just off-kilter enough to jolt this lovely look at happiness. Madonna has revisited the warm, proud pop soul that was always the chief basis of her success....The track is as fine as Senegalese dynamo ISMAEL LO's stunning "Diba Diba Rek" (Mango), a rare instance of folky Euro soul music with no Peter Gabriel-isms audible anywhere....Poor JADE. Their intelligently sung "5-4-3-2 (Yo! Time Is Up)" (Giant) is stuck in a supposedly hip radio formula. The overfamiliar sound overshadows their topic of female independence. This situation seems more advanced—eerie—with "Foolin' Around" (Big Beat/Atlantic) by CHANGING FACES, one of the 50 or so female artists with whom producer R. Kelly has hit. This fails as sexy mood music; instead, it's sharp mood music—killer guitar licks—where the capable singers sound like they're beaming in their sex worries from Saturn....A dancehall cover of Joe South's '60s hit "Games People Play" sounds promising, but in the hands of INNER

CIRCLE (Big Beat/Atlantic), it's just catchy. A live alternative rock medley of the Supremes' "My World Is Empty Without You" and "I Hear a Symphony" sounds doubtful, but in the hands of Greg Dulli and the AFGHAN WHIGS, on their *What Fail Is Like* EP (Elektra), it's brilliant—Motown with all the velvet worn off....Naming your debut single after yourself seems lame, but LUCAS pulls that off and more. You've seen the video, you've watched it swing, but do you want to listen to "Lucas With the Lid Off" (Big Beat/Atlantic)? Yeah, you do, because the novelty is built right into the music, which travels with ease between the '40s and the '90s....Want to know why you buy a single these days? For a package like "You Want This" (Virgin) by JANET JACKSON. Six tracks, one with MC Lyte putting her foot down for a few ripping seconds, one reimagined as dancehall, one a new song called "70s Love Groove" that will keep that cool retro thing alive for the foreseeable future. You've got "Love Child" samples dissolving into Jam-Lewis rhythm walls finally giving way to a massive attack that people will dance to all year long. And you've got Janet, whose legendary, modest voice now behaves on tape as confidently as any big-lunged icon. "You Want This" deserves to go multiplatinum.



INTERVIEW: ISMAEL LO



JANET JACKSON

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DR. DRE

Concrete Roots: Anthology • Triple X

I remember hearing "The Bridge Is Over" for the first time in 1987—and marvelling at the mastery and arrogance in KRS-One's victory over MC Shan and crew. For many hip hop fans, MC battles are the ultimate. The BDP/Queensbridge conflict is seared into our consciousness as one of the most telling events of what is now touted as hip hop's Golden Age.

Whatever folks eventually choose to call the present period, a couple of points are fairly clear: First, MC battles (if the term still applies) have mutated into acrimonious, posturing contests in which the participants have little respect for keeping the beat-downs verbalistic. Second, the most significant of these have stemmed from the spiraling breakup of N.W.A. Check Eazy-E's homophobic demonization of Dr. Dre and the World Class Wreckin' Cru; this after being soundly trashed by Dre on *The Chronic*.

Though the recordings collected on *Concrete Roots* date back to the 1980s, the album serves as an eloquent battle response. Put



together by DJ Flash—the archivist responsible for *West Coast Rap: The First Dynasty* and *West Coast Rap: The Renegades* (both on Rhino)—*Concrete Roots* attempts to anthologize Dre's early work and put the infamous Wreckin' Cru in its proper context.

It works because Flash puts Dre's considerable talent in historical perspective. The material ranges from "Dre's Beat" and "The Planet," Dre's mid-'80s collaborations with Cli-N-Tel, to the Wreckin' Cru's classic 1987 joint "Must Be the Music" and Michelle's smash "No More Lies" (1989). There are also remixes of early Dre works by Cli-N-Tel and Unknown, including "Surgery" and "Juice."

The most pleasing, tragic, and ironic moments on *Concrete Roots* are reserved for the D.O.C. If you haven't listened to "The Formula" or "It's Funky Enough" in a while, here's a reminder of what hip hop lost in the car accident that smashed the D.O.C.'s larynx. Then check him out alongside N.W.A on "The Grand Finale"—listen to Dre's shouts to Eazy-E and "the supadope manager Jerry Heller," and wonder at the convergence of black men's egos, white paternalism, and cutthroat corporatism. Now, anybody want to battle?

Selwyn Seyfu Hinds



XMAS ROUND UP

Sure, for some of you out there, Christmas and the entire holiday season might be a time for basking in the warm glow of family and friends and reflecting on the birth of Jesus Christ. But for record companies, yule time is the cool time to shove product down consumers' throats.

The Christmas Album has become as much a part of the whole Xmas thang as Santa or the refund counter at Macy's. We're *not* talking about a faceless bunch o' folks cranking out holiday tunes—no, *booye!* The Christmas discs that will be addressed here belong to that most fabulous realm: the Celebrity Christmas Album, or CCA. Now, CCAs fall into

two categories: the famous-person-records-some-timeless-holiday-classics CCAs, and the last-famous-person-you'd-expect-to-record-a-CCA CCAs. The prime example of the latter subdivision would have to be last year's brilliant merging of the holy and the oily: **CHRISTMAS AT LUKE'S HOUSE**. And for the pervert in all of us, there's: **CHRISTMAS AT LUKE'S SEX SHOP** this year, plus a bunch of other goodies. Artists automatically lose points if they include "The Christmas Song." It's my list—play by my rules.

Both LaFace and Motown have reissued discs they debuted in 1993. **LAFACE FAMILY CHRISTMAS** features Toni Braxton, TLC (with a killer version of "Sleigh Ride"), and OutKast (who perform a very unholidaylike "Player's Ball"). Boyz II Men's **CHRISTMAS INTERPRETATIONS** is back, no doubt in the hopes that some of the nearly 1 million people who've gobbled them up will fork over more dead presidents for a sweet, if not over-thrilling, Xmas collection.

Donna Summer's first holiday offering, **CHRISTMAS SPIRIT** (Mercury), is drenched in strings and celestial choirs, but is a bit heavy-handed and lacks the old *bo bo ho*—which somehow befits this disco queen turned born-again Christian. Another CCA virgin, Freddie Jackson, loses his cherry with **AT CHRISTMAS** (RCA). Catchy title, huh? This album is a lush, some-more-nog-and-brandy-my-love experience. And **MERRY CHRISTMAS** (Sony), a CCA from Mariah Carey, is sure to dominate the charts.



For those in need of sleigh bells ring-a-ding-dinging, might I suggest Tony Bennett's **SNOWFALL** (Columbia) and **HOLLY AND IVY** by Natalie Cole (Elektra)? The newly anointed pooh-bah of postmodernism adds his typically classy touch to, uh, you guessed it, those Timeless Holiday Classics. *Holly and Ivy* was produced by the team responsible for Cole's *Unforgettable*, and believe it or not, this jazzy, jumping record swings like a mother. Natalie's "Jingle Bell Rock" is all that and some mistletoe.

Also way hip is **ATEJANO COUNTRY CHRISTMAS** (Arista Texas). A smoking assortment of Tex-Mex beats and festive *feliz navidad* cheer, this disc is what CCAs were meant to be: imaginative, hip, fun, and suitable for any occasion. Besides, once you've heard Freddy Fender and Flaco Jimenez wreck shop on "Frosty the Snowman," there's no going back.

Rhino's **ORIGINAL SOUL CHRISTMAS**, originally released in 1968 and featuring tracks from folks like Carla Thomas, Otis Redding, Solomon Burke (plus Clarence Carter's supernaughty "Back Door Santa"), is undeniably cool. And **JINGLEBELL JAM: JAZZ CHRISTMAS CLASSICS** (also on Rhino), with cuts from the likes of Chet Baker, Dexter Gordon, and proto-funkster Louis Jordan, might even be cooler. Staying on the old, old-school tip, check out the newly reissued **CHRISTMAS WITH THE PLATTERS** (Mercury). Last and best is **THE SOUND OF HOPE** (EastWest) from the wonderful Boys Choir of Harlem. It's not *technically* a Christmas album (though they do sing "This Christmas"), but the record's sheer joyousness embodies the noncommercial aspect of the season.

There. I've done my job; now you do yours. Get with the spirit, max out the plastic, let the nog do its job, and everybody say, "Ho ho ho," y'all!

Amy Linden





BLACKSHEEP

Non-Fiction • Mercury

If you're looking for another *A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing*, forget it. But the bad boys who were down with the mostly defunct Native Tongues and Flavor Unit crews are back after a three-year hiatus. And with the new *Non-Fiction*, Black Sheep show another side of themselves. Right away, in the "Non-Fiction Intro," the Sheep—Dres and Mista Lawnge—inform you that *Non-Fiction* is "something else."

Their second album is way less humorous and "honey"-conscious than the first. And Black Sheep's music has shifted: It's simpler, more eerie, and more jazzy. On tracks like "Who's Next?" and "Gotta Get Up," they hold off on Wolf's signature cowbells, while bass lines and horns get muffled and sped up. "Summa tha Time" has a nice Latin mellowness—the piano and flute strut behind vocals from the (Black Sheep-produced) girl group Emáge. Not just another hip hop/R&B jam, "Summa" is a real, head-nodding groove.

The way Black Sheep rhyme, however, has not changed. In the aptly titled "Autobiographical," Dres flips the script on himself, recollecting his badass days and flowing in a non-hyper, Native Tongue-style, storytelling manner. It's a detailed, almost visual vignette about a boy who constantly lives close to trouble. And on "Let's Get Cozy," Mista Lawnge describes an explicit sexual prelude, reassuring fans that the "Sugardick Daddy" can still be as nasty as he wants to be. Tunes like "Peace to the Niggas," "Me & My Brother," and "We Boys," though, suffer from sophomore slouchiness. The production on these cuts is lazy—hooks aim high and miss.

But mercifully, on *Non-Fiction* Black Sheep seldom fall into playing the tired game of who's-hard-and-who's-not. Does *hard* necessarily equal *hoodlum*? For Black Sheep, it's just not that simple.

Latasha Natasha Diggs

A black and white photograph of a man's face, focusing on his mouth and teeth. He has a large, ornate gold chain-link grill on his upper teeth. The background is dark and textured. Below the image, the title "GRAVEDIGGАЗ" is written in a large, distressed, blocky font. "GRAVEDIGGАЗ" is on the top line, and "6 FEET DEEP" is on the line below it, with "6" and "FEET" in smaller letters. Below the title, the word "INCLUDES" is followed by a list of track titles: "DIARY OF A MADMAN", "CONSTANT ELEVATION", and "NOWHERE TO RUN, NOWHERE TO HIDE". At the bottom, there is a small square image showing three men's faces. Logos for "GEE STREET" and "DVE" are at the bottom right, along with the text "GEE STREET™ LICENSED BY INKED RECORDS, INC. © 1994 INKED RECORDS INC." and "GEE STREET GEE STREET DVE".

Miller
Genuine Draft

Cold JAMS

Readers' choices for the top 10 singles of the month.

1. **At Your Best (You Are Love)** Aaliyah (Background/Jive)
2. **Flava In Ya Ear** Craig Mack (Bad Boy/Arista)
3. **I'll Take Her** Al Skratch Feat. Brian McKnight (Mercury)
4. **I Wanna Be Down** Brandy (Atlantic)
5. **Juicy/Unbelievable** The Notorious B.I.G. (Bad Boy/Arista)
6. **Here Comes The Hotstepper** Ini Kamoze (Columbia)
7. **Black Coffee** Heavy D. & The Boyz (Uptown/MCA)
8. **Do You Wanna Get Funky** C+C Music Factory (Columbia)
9. **Stroke You Up** Changing Faces (Spoiled Rotten/Big Beat/Atlantic)
10. **Buck Em Down** Black Moon (Wreck/Nervous)

Last Month's Winners:

Reginald Lee Tacoma, WA
Sara Harris Lompoc, CA
Judith Jean-Pierre Brooklyn, NY
Michelle Garner Oakland, CA

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BOBBITO'S SOUND CHECK

Bobbito Garcia plays the tracks; SPECIAL ED states the facts

Special Ed splashed into the hip hop world with the classic "I Got It Made" in 1989. Back then, he was the "youngest in charge." His offbeat pattern delivery makes him one of my favorite Brooklyn lyricists. After two albums and a three-year hiatus, Ed returned last summer on the posse cut "Crooklyn" (with Masta Ace and Buckshot), from the soundtrack to Spike Lee's film.

• Special Ed, "Toxing"

SE: That shit sounds mad young. That's how niggas need to be, man—some real freestyle on a beat. I'd do it differently now, but for back then, that shit ruled.

B: It was my favorite cut on your album.

SE: My favorite too. I thought it should've been a single. The record company didn't want to promote me as a real nigga—just as a cool, sweet motherfucker. The jam was a revelation for me. I was young. niggas were influencing me. I'm influencing me now.

• Paul Simon, "Me and Julio Down by the Schoolyard"

SE: I know this shit! [Sings the chorus] I go through all

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"Your Love Is A..."

THE NOTORIOUS B.I.G.—

Ready to Die

NEIL YOUNG—

Harvest

ABOVE THE LAW—

"Black Superman"

JOEY LAWRENCE—

"I Can't Help Myself"

BUNNY WAILER—

"Trouble on the Road"

ILL AL SKRATCH—

"I'll Take Her"

C+C MUSIC FACTORY—

Anything Goes!

BEN HARPER—

Welcome to the Cruel World

DES REE—

"I Ain't Movin'

kinds of records doing what I do. The schoolyard is a big part of my life, so I can relate. I don't know what the fuck he's talking about, though. My schoolyard is a little different; you know what I'm saying? The music reminds me of some of' funny country type shit. On the level of lyrics, it's a little hardcore for Mr. Garfunkel or whoever the fuck this is.

• Paul Simon.

SE: His homeboy, same shit.

B: I thought you liked country music—with that song "Hoodoo," plus "Toxing" had that "Do-si-do your partner" violin sample.

SE: That Julio shit was all right, but I wouldn't listen to it again unless I was red.

• Billie Holiday, "You're So Desirable"

SE: That's some Little Rascals shit, kid! Hold up, stop that, we ain't gonna sit here and listen to that cool, calm blues shit. We're not in no bar! This could've been background music for Alafita fucking Alafita with, like, Spanky peeking at them. I don't know why Alafita didn't get any pusey. Alafita was all open, but Alafita was stupid, worrying about his hair.

B: You know who did this? It's Billie Holiday.

SE: Yeah, she's hot, but I'm not gonna sit here with two niggas and listen to that. I'll sit back and smoke a blunt and be, like, "Listen to this, baby."

• Ultramagnetic MC's, "Ease Back"

SE: Ultra rules, since back in the days. Kool Keith is ill.

Got his own lyrical style. When I first heard them, I said, Wow!

B: I could tell you appreciated them when I first heard



you on "I Got It Made" and you said, "I got a frog." I, like, bugged shit like that.

SE: Gotta be different. Ultra should be the ones with albums that are hitting in the stores instead of the corny motherfuckers. Ultra's got originality; people still bite them. My new album is gonna be like that—original and strictly lyrical.

• The Police, "Voices Inside My Head"

SE: Too much reverbi Nah, it just sounds like it's gonna be a long instrumental. I need some type of change in arrangement, vocals, or lyrics.

B: It actually changes up later in the song.

SE: But I'm not trying to wait on that. The first 10 seconds of a jam usually decide if a song is happening. If I don't hear nothing, that shit is dead. This song reminds me of some '70s disco shit, like you could mix it with "Good Times" or "If a Lovebeat." Who is that?

B: The Police.

SE: They need to get off that disco shit and get on the raw ragga shit. Take out the drums, and they could've had a jam there.

• Brownstone, "Pass the Lovin'"

SE: I was hoping you'd tell me to stop it sooner.

SE: Heh, heh, heh. That's the usual horny group sound. Nah, that's some smooth shit. They ain't fronting; they saying, "Yo, I want dick now!" I want to meet them and congratulate them! Who dat?

B: Brownstone.

SE: They ain't ashamed to say what they want, and I appreciate that in a woman. They got nice lips too.

DIONNE WARWICK'S TOP 10

Current picks—in no particular order

EARTH, WIND & FIRE—

That's the Way the World Goes

WYNONNE MARSALIS—

In This House, on This Morning

STEVIE WONDER—

Innervisions

NATALIE COLE—

Unforgettable With Love

FOURPLAY—

Fourplay

LUTHER VANDROSS—

Songs

JOHNNY MATHIS—

Friends in Love

WHITNEY HOUSTON—

The Bodyguard

SARAH VAUGHAN—

Brazilian Romance

PATTI AUSTIN—

The Secret Place



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I recommend **JOSHUA REDMAN**'s *Mood Swing* (Warner Bros.) to you on two counts: (1) The music will treat you right, and (2) Redman's self-penned liner notes, which lament the air of intellectual intimidation that too often accompanies jazz. He invites regular mortals to kick back, have a listen, and stop stressing over whether or not they're high-minded enough to appreciate the grooves. As Redman writes, "Jazz is not about flat fives or sharp nines or metric subdivisions or substitute chord changes. Jazz is about feeling, communication, honesty, and soul. Jazz is not supposed to boggle the mind. Jazz is meant to enrich the spirit. Jazz is for your heart."



On *Mood Swing*'s program of sounds to increase the heart's bounty are 11 original Redman compositions. Working with his quartet (which includes pianist Brad Mehldau, bassist Christian McBride, and drummer Brian Blade), Redman uses his tenor like he's landscaping a range of emotional terrain, from the tear-drenched to the terrifying. His melodies have an almost comical way of shifting from the melancholic to the sarcastic in the space of a single phrase. The opening cut, "Sweet Sorrow," provides ripe evidence of this quality in both his writing and improvising. Redman lazily drifts around the beat like a subtle seducer, getting your mind, body, and soul open at the same time.

His best playing has always been characterized by a laid-way-back-in-the-cut approach, but on *Mood Swing*, Redman and his mates accentuate that aspect with a funkier brand of suspensefulness. There is much elegance and virility going on here too, the kind of suave that creeps up on you rather than checking itself in the mirror every two minutes. You could baste a lot of barbecue to this music and sop your plate to it as well.

There are tons of **WEATHER REPORT** albums to choose from and, since the group was together about 15 years, several eras to choose from as well. One of my favorites is 1977's *Tale Spinnin'* (Columbia), recently issued on CD for the first time, which features bass innovator Alphonso Johnson and some of Wayne Shorter's and Joe Zawinul's funkiest and most poignant writing for the group. "Between the Thighs" is a symbiotic romp—like Bernie Worrell and Bootsy writing for chamber orchestra—"Bodhi" is like some off-mad Bomboy mood music, and "Freezing Fire" puts you in the mind of a collaboration between the Beatles and Fellini's composer Nino Rota.

Let's go back in time to the '40s and a man many would call the missing link between bebop and hip hop. Brother's name is **SLIM GAILLARD**, and his mission in life was to talk, scat, and goof his own merry brand of foolishness over some flavorful swing tracks. On the collection *Laughing in Rhythm: The Best of the Verve Years*, Gaillard's titles tell half the story with concepts like "Serenade to a Poodle," "The Bartender's Just Like a Mother," and "Mishugana Mambo." If you love Big Mirkie, Slim is your man from way back.

Lastly, I want to tell you about my man **CECIL TAYLOR**, whose *Feel Trio* got a new joint out, *Celebrated Blazons* (FMP), 56 minutes of flat-out, go-for-yours improvisation by three of the freest—yet still sure-handed—players jazz has ever produced: Taylor, bassist William Parker, and drummer Tony Oxley. If you've gotten bored with sampling jazz from the '60s and want to jump a century and maybe a couple of galaxies in the process, get down with the Taylor theory of musical astrophysics.

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BOOM SHO TS

by Rob Kenner

DUMBEST ALBUM OF THE YEAR: *Stir It Up* (Columbia). Combining reggae veterans like Finchers and Sugar Minott with unknowns like Kinky and undecipherables like Michael Wolff, this "genre-bending" collection is more of a harebrained mix. The funny thing is, there's some good stuff here, including Ini Kamoze's hook-studded hit "Here Comes the Hotstepper."

TOP 10 COMPILATIONS: There's a whole heap of new compilations out there, all claiming to be the one-and-only must-have. It's nearly impossible to imagine a definitive collection in a market that moves as fast as dancehall reggae, but these are some of the year's best attempts.

•1. THE BEST OF REGGAE DANCEHALL MUSIC: DANCEHALL STYLE VOL. I-W (Profile). This five-CD boxed set (including a 1994 megamix courtesy of New York's DJ Seeborn) collects six years' worth of the compilations that set the standard by which others are judged.

•2. BEST OF THE BEST VOLUME 2 (Xterminator/Ras). Fourteen Xterminator boom shots, from Ini Kamoze's original "Hot Stepper" to Capleton's smash hit "Almshouse," but sadly not including Cocoa Tea's heartwarming "Good Life."

•3. REWIND: 12 DANCEHALL HITS STRAIGHT FROM YARD (Profile). Over the years, the Roof International Crew has gotten new styles out of big-name artists like Burro Banton, Cutty Ranks, and Tony Rebel. But even more exciting are the new talents like the singer/DJ duo Jiggy King and Tony Curris or the bug-out Future Troubles, whose "Kung Fu" style has champion boppers stretching muscles they never knew they had.

•4. RAM JAMA GWANNA (Star Trail). With well-chosen vocalists and riddims that feel like they were played by a human rather than a computer, Miami's Star Trail posse has blazed quite a trail in a relatively short time. Beres Hammond's wrenching "Come Back Home," Courtney Melody and Fleshly Ranks' "Rude Boy Business," and Everton Blender's "Create a Sound" stand out among 15 choice cuts served up here.

•5. XAMOUNT OF NICENESS (Grapevine). Over the years, crack engineer Peter Chemist has cranked out classics like Tenor Saw's "Pumpkin Belly," Cobras' "Tek Him," and Ninjaman's "Things A Gwan," all of which are included among the 18 selections here. To judge from this disc, though, Chemist seems to work better with DJs than with singers.

•6. DANCEHALL MASSIVE 2 (November). A less ambitious but solidly selected 12-cut compilation. After combining vintage Shabba slackness ("Love Punanny Bad") with the latest Cocoa Tea and Garnet Silk, the anthologist won me over by including a crucial Tenor Saw remix that I never heard before.

•7. SOUND BOY KILLING (Shanachie). A compact but well-rounded anthology that ranges from Jameson's catchy "Boom Shok A-Tack" to Freddie McGregor and Snagglepus' "Carry On Bring Come." The album also includes "Murderer" (by the newly dreadlocked Buju Banton), the anthem that started dancehall's antiviolence trend.

•8. REGGAE UNDER COVER (Relativity). An album of reggae covers is a great idea, and even if this isn't the ultimate, there's a lot to like here. Pam Hall sings Whitney's (or is it Dolly's?) "I Will Always Love You," J.C. Lodge interprets Minnie Riperton's "Lovin' You," and Toni Braxton gets covered twice—by Sanchez and Sweet-Tea—which, I guess, is the sincerest form of flattery.

•9. REGGAE GOLD 94: STRICTLY THE BEST VOLS. 1 AND 04 (VP Records). The latest installments in VP's aptly named *Strictly the Best* series are 13 (all DJs) and 14 (all singers). Both are flawless, as up-to-the-minute as any anthology can be. *Reggae Gold* offers a blend of singers and DJs, including three recent slices of the arena riddim—Garnett Silk's "Splashing Dashing," Tony Rebel's "Teach the Children," and Nadine Sutherland's "Baby Face"—that are destined to become classics.

•10. MASSIVE ALL STARS (Massive B). From Professor Grizly's lilting "Hero" to Burro Banton's signature jam, "Boom Wa Dis" (remixed for the hip-hop heads), the uncut ghetto vibes on *All Stars* even include two pieces done by Mad Lion before he blew up, as well as the reggae version of "Real Love" that electrified clubs a year ago.

OLD-TIME SOMETHING COME BACK AGAIN: A FEW OF THE YEAR'S MOST CRUCIAL REISSUES

•BURNING SPEAR, "HAIL ILM." (Heartbeat). What better way to celebrate Winston Rodney's 25th anniversary in the business?

•FREDDIE MCREEGOR, "ZION CHAN" (Heartbeat). Freddie meets Niney the Observer inna dry and heavy late-'70s style.

•HALF PINT, "CLASSICS" (Hightone). The Channel One shots that made Pint's name before the monster hit "Greetings." Not to be missed.

•KEITH HUDSON, "PICKA DUB" (Blood & Fire). Smoldering mid-'70s dub played by the Barret brothers and mixed to the verge of insanity by Hudson, an underappreciated master of X-ray music.

•RESPECT TO STUDIO ONE (Heartbeat). This double CD is a small token of appreciation to Clement "Coxsone" Dodd, the producer who gave birth to reggae as we now know it.

•MORE HOTTEST HITS (Heartbeat). Before reggae, rock steady was the sound, Duke Reid's Treasure Isle the label. Smooth harmonies and solid songwriting—what a concept!

Now wake the town and tell the people, as we lick 1994 back from the top to the very last drop. **RIDDIM OF THE YEAR:** "Pepperson" (MadHouse). Dave Kelly's artful, futuristic, fat-bottom bogle beat was hummin' comin' acha out of every dancehall and passing jeep this year. Terror Fabulous' "Number Two" started the craze, but it seems that every vocalist on the island vowed to be peppered. Look for a hit-packed peppered LP out soon on MadHouse.

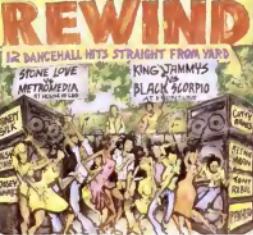
NAME OF THE YEAR: Everton Blender is neither a mixologist nor a kitchen appliance but a strikingly original vocalist out of the Star Trail camp. Just as Finchers inspired Pliers, Grip Wrench, and Spanner Banner, if Blender keeps turning out wicked tunes like "Create a Sound," watch out for a gaggle of copycats. How about Triston Toaster, Winston Waffle Iron, or Egg Beater?

X-RATED TUNE OF THE YEAR: General Degree, "Pianist." This hilariously suggestive ode to an organ without a keyboard marked the high point in a banner year for this young, fun-loving DJ.

DJ OF THE YEAR: Capleton. With lyrics, manic delivery, consciousness, and consistency, he made noise in the late 1980s with "No. 1 Upon the Look Good Chart" and hasn't broken stride (or landed a major-label deal) since. He's never put out a solo selection, but you may not miss "Chalice" (Afrika Star) or "Die the Trinity" (Star Trail).



Photo: Douglas Duju Martin



BRAND NUBIAN

Everything Is Everything • Elektra

Four years ago a four-man crew from New Rule (New Rochelle, N.Y.) bounced their blend of awareness and street cleverness on hip hop's glass- and stone-strewn schoolyard and scored with a straight-up Patrick Ewing beat-dunk, reinforced by a Joe Louis-like lyrical knockout barrage. Back then, Brand Nubian stood tall as Derek X, Grand Puba Maxwell, Lord Jamar, and DJ Alamo.

On that first album, *One for All*, these cats spoke to an education-deprived, tar-toned stretch of youth, telling them that black men were the "fathers of civilization, gods of the universe." They meshed this platform with bitches, blunts, and brew, then rattled these ingredients together like a curbside dice champion deeply in debt with the wrong set of niggas.

Soon after, Grand Puba departed and dropped solo science on *Reel to Reel*, while Derek X and Lord Jamar let loose *In God We Trust*. Fans mourned the split, but embraced both projects: *Slammin' joints* like the Nubs' "Punks Jump Up to Get Beat Down" and Puba's "360" (*What Goes Around*) made the breakup a little easier to accept.



Round three is Brand Nubian's new *Everything Is Everything*. It features the familiar scratchy-whiny vocals of Sadat X and a newly developed, slow-tinged draw courtesy of Lord Jamar. Sadat's for-self spot, "Alladat," is a clear highlight. Produced by New York hotshot Buckwild, the cut features guest vocals from Busta Rhymes; it's the fly shit—but it's the only piece of *Everything Is Everything* worthy of Brand Nubian's classic signature.

"Claimin' I'm a Criminal," with its piano stabs, police sirens, and dying-battery-in-the-Walkman-paced drum licks, chronicles a day in the life of the forever-suspect black male, but the musical body comes off cheesy. "Gang Bang" aims to expose the police as a thug-filled gang, but utilizes Curtis Mayfield's too-familiar "Freddie's Dead (Theme From Superfly)" riff, taking that composition nowhere new. "Hold On" presents Lord J and Sadat on a spoken mission over Simply Red's megapop smash "Holdin' Back the Years." This song is brightly painted "commercial," and it's sadly a cliché.

This ain't over, though. Peep it: After Puba drops his next LP, be on the lookout for a Brand Nubian reunion album. Until then, I'm dream back to the days when Grand Puba, Derek X, and Lord Jamar truly were all for one.

Sacha Jenkins

BLACK SHEEP

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ROBERTA FLACK

Roberta • Atlantic

At first listen, Roberta Flack's new album sounds like yet another "unforgettable" set of standards. But thankfully, that's not the case. This disc harks back to the early 1970s, when songs were the true divas of the music business; when producing a record was about giving a singer a soundscape (not just a phat loop); and when R&B was an intersection of gospel, blues, and funk. With the coproduced Roberta, Flack revisits her early, pre-Donny Hathaway days, when she haunted us with a bell-clear tone, melancholy melodies, and albums that dripped with the joys and pains of black-on-black love.



The first few tracks are an eclectic set of remakes-made-new-again: clever reharmonizations, unexpected (if sometimes overwrought) rhythmic readings, and the soulful, spontaneous background vocals of coproducers Jerry and Katreese Barnes. Flack revisits Duke Ellington's "In a Sentimental Mood" as a funky samba and interprets his "Prelude to a Kiss" as a dreamy, hip hop-jazz mélange. Later she speeds up B.B. King's "Thrill Is Gone" to a get-happy tempo and then gives 1982's "It Might Be You" a sultry R. Kelly-esque mix. The song eventually gets weighed down by a too-long monologue, but it's clear Flack understands that if you're gonna record a remake, make it yours.

Other than "Prelude" and the self-penned, Brazilian-esque "You'll Never Know," the remainder of the album finds the Queen of Understated Soul crooning Tin Pan Alley standards like "Isn't It Romantic?" and "Tenderly." Flack sounds less inspired here, partially because the jazz quartet she works with on these particular classics doesn't quite have that swing.

But then there's Flack's version of Al Green's "Let's Stay Together." The ballad is rendered so intimately, it could make you weep. This passionate vocal performance is a reminder of what's missing from this "sex me" era of R&B: genuine, non-calculated emotion.

Gordon Chambers

Marlo

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CARMELLA THOMAS

When the pain of living with alcoholic and abusive parents became too much for Carmella Thomas, she left. Boom! Just like that, she hitched a ride to anywhere and ended up in Stockton, CA. Being 11 at the time, she eventually returned to Milwaukee, WI, and her parents, only to run away again and again. The State finally stepped in, but their solution was to shuttle her in and out of foster care programs until her insurance ran out on her 18th birthday. She celebrated her first night as a legal adult at the local Salvation Army—homeless.

Rather than falling into despair, Carmella decided to get with her own program. "I was used to being taken care of by the State. Being on my own, I had to adjust." She adapted by taking classes at Milwaukee Tech and receiving her high school diploma. She also started looking out for other kids at her shelter. "They were just like me, they put up a big front, but inside they were scared just as I was." McCannon Brown, who headed the homeless advocacy group Repairers of the Breach, was inspired by the effort Carmella gave to others, and when Carmella turned 20, she found a true home with Ms. Brown. Carmella continued her work in the community, becoming a columnist for the Repairers of the Breach Newspaper, coordinating meal programs at her church, and organizing youth and community programs. In her scant free time, she hoops it up with the fellows as the first and only woman player in Milwaukee's Midnight Basketball League, "In the Paint."

PUBLIC ALLIES

the national non profit group that helps young community activists obtain jobs and vital work experience in the social arena, also recognized Carmella's unselfish determination to help her community. Through their assistance, she is working now with Milwaukee Associates in Urban Development, the City of Milwaukee Dept. of Housing, and the City-wide Public Housing Resident Council, creating youth councils at housing projects, and working on violence prevention, clean up, and other important issues. "I want to be there for people, and I think my past allows me to communicate with and understand them better. Public Allies will teach me better communication skills and allow me the opportunity to work side by side with peers who are committed to creating change in our community." One of her goals is to create a ropes course facility for the youth of Milwaukee in order to teach them to trust others.

As for life after Public Allies, Carmella has a dream. "I want to build this place for youth who are in the system, where they could come and live and go to school and get jobs." Her dream house would be a center for kids caught between foster care and self-sufficiency, and under her tutelage they might not have to endure the trials she suffered. For those caught up in any of the many struggles of adolescence, Carmella has some golden advice: "Never give up hope, because there are people out there who care, even though at first it may not look that way."



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a film by John Singleton

HIGHER LEARNING
question the knowledge

COLUMBIA
PICTURES

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In 1994 R&B legends Aretha Franklin and Patti LaBelle returned to the dance floor with "Pride (A Deeper Love)" and "The Right Kind of Lover," respectively. Cole and Clivilles patched up their differences with Martha Wash and reformed C+C Music Factory. Dance floor maverick Dan Hartman died.

Vocal house music did well on the dance charts, but in the underground clubs instruments monopolized the playlists. Hardcore techno all but died, replaced by jungle. John Lydon went techno. Bill Laswell made an ambient album. Two non-dance music artists—Shai and k.d. lang—had dance floor hits thanks to the magic of remixing. And a record of African pygmy chants and a Solomon Island lullaby was one of the most popular sounds in clubs.

From the deepest house to the most abstract ambient, the dance music world must seem stranger by the year to an outsider. Categories and subgenres come and go. Differences proliferate at an extraordinary rate, as the scene divides into multiple camps: jungle, trance, tribal, intelligent, hardcore, ambient, vocal house, progressive house, jazz house, ethno-techno, and on and on.

Consequently, there was no one record that summed up the year, no single outstanding anthem that unified this fragmented, DJ-driven global underground. Instead, there was a whole slew of mini-initiatives, a sonic fest of disparate sounds.



Dance Pop Phenomenon of the Year: **M PEOPLE**. Accessible yet intelligent and adventurous dance pop of the highest order can be heard on the Brit trio's *Elegant Slumming* (Epic), including the hits "Moving On Up" and "One Night in Heaven."

Vocal House Album of the Year: **That Was Then, This Is Now** (Columbia) by **TEN CITY**. The Chicago house music veterans dispense once again the belief that this type of music doesn't translate into album form. Runners-up: Crystal Waters's *Storyteller* (Mercury) and Ce Ce Peniston's *Thought Ya Knew* (A&M).

Vocal House Cut of the Year: "Feel What You Want" (Champion/EastWest) by **KRISTINE W.** The former Vegas lounge singer moved the music boys this year with this spongy, smoldering floor filler. Runners-up: Juliet Roberts's "I Want You" (Warner Bros.) and Michael Watford's "So Into You" (EastWest).

Instrumental House/Tribal Cut of the Year: "Dream Drums" (Eightball) by **LECTROLOUV**. Produced by Fred Jorio, remixed by Junior Vasquez, this heavily percussive track became an anthem at Sound Factory, the New York club where Vasquez deejays. Runner-up: Vasquez's own "X" (Tribal America).

Growth Industry of the Year: ambient compilation albums.

Jungle Cut of the Year: "Incredible" by **M-BEAT FEATURING GENERAL LEVY**. Raggajungle. Huge in Europe. The next big thing in this country?

Techno Whiz Kids of the Year: Forget Aphex Twin. British duo **ORBITAL** come up with 1994's most compelling electronic music on their *Snivilization* (Fir).

Strongest Dance Sensation of the Year: "Deep Forest" by **DEEP FOREST**. Wedding ethnomusicological samples of singing African pygmies and a Solomon Island lullaby to dance music rhythms, the French duo scored the surprise club hit of the year, instigating an ethno-techno trend.

Armchair Techno Album of the Year: *Lifeforms* (Astralwerks) by **FUTURE SOUND OF LONDON**. Electronic music with an organic feel. A postmodern primitive pot-head's delight.

The Record Labels That Made '94 Happen: Eightball, Astralwerks, Ftr, Strictly Rhythm, EastWest, Epic, Instinct.

Most Embarrassing Dance Record of the Year: "Ode to Prince Teddy (The Real Thing)" by **SCREAMIN' RACHEL**. A standing joke on the house music scene for years, Screamin' Rachel surpasses her talentless and tasteless self with this tacky and necrophiliac exploitation of her dead mentor, who was brutally murdered in a robbery earlier this year.

Most Imitating Dance Record of the Year: "Cuban Pete" by **JIM CARREY**. Stupid is as stupid does.

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VARIOUS ARTISTS

White Men Can't Wrap • Rhino

As early as the 1940s, pale-skinned yokels like Woody Guthrie ("Talking Dust Bowl Blues") and Bob Wills ("Sally Goodin") were making hobo-dada rap records with at least as much rhythm as, say, Beck doing "Loser." And Bob Dylan's 1965 "Subterranean Homesick Blues," "The Hombres" 1967 "Let It Out (Let It All Hang Out)," and Charlie Daniels's 1973 "Uneasy Rider" (where he gets chased by rednecks) are so-called talking blues that sound more like Kurtis Blow than any editorials Gil Scott-Heron or the Last Poets ever recited.

White Men Can't Wrap, a new disc compiled by the half-wits at Spy magazine, includes none of the aforementioned brilliant songs but wastes space with a Lenny Bruce bestiility poem, a dance reminiscence of shouting, marching marines from *Full Metal Jacket*, and kitschy cover versions of pop tunes by Dragnet's Joe Friday and *Family Affair*'s Mr. French. Still, it's the best, if not the only, overview of pre-hip



hop Caucasian rapping ever attempted. But it could be a lot better.

The CD does include some genuine talking blues—most notably *Bonanza* star Lorne Greene's 1964 chart topper, "Ring," which actually concerns a "posse" with guns. And Commander Cody's 1972 "Hot Rod Lincoln" is faster and funkier than what you get from Warren G. "The Rain in Spain," Rex Harrison and Julie Andrews's dainty elocution lesson from *My Fair Lady* (1956), has a festive mambo ending, but a more raplike example of midcentury gentility would've been Martyn Green's rendition of "I Am the Very Model of a Modern Major-General" by Gilbert and Sullivan.

The inclusion of Napoleon XIV's 1966 novelty "They're Coming to Take Me Away, Ha-Haaa!" is a stroke of *Insane-In-the-brain* genius, but if Spy is shooting for the comedy-rap market, why leave out the Pipkins' 1970 "Gimme Dat Ding" and Steve Martin's "King Tut"? And finally, I'm sorry, but there is no way you can chart the history of white gangsta rap without "The Night Chicago Died," a 1974 No. 1 pop hit about Al Capone and 100 dead cops recorded by British hacks Paper Lace. Ice-T has nothing on those guys.

Chuck Eddy

MC Solaar and Spearhead With Special Guest Urban Species

When the cold of the winter starts to heat you down, pop inside a warm club to sample some of the best sounds in the recent wave of acid jazz/hip-hop hybrids.

African-Parisian phenom **MC Solaar**, who first got over with the inimitable **Grwa**, serves up proof positive that the French language is as good as any for rippling up slick rhymes over thick beats.

More emphatically, even if you're not fluent in French, Solaar's tone carries more than enough communication for your heart and mind. Soul survivor **Michael Franklin** is the frontman for **Spearhead**, which rises from the critically acclaimed ashes of **The Beatmatics** and **Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy**. Establishing a deeper groove as far as sonful lennings, **Spearhead** lets you expand your mind while you shake it on the dancefloor. Opening things up each evening is **Urban Species**, who come straight from the UK boiling pot of eclectic musical influences, throwing down with a touch of hip-hop, jazz, soul, rock, and anything else they need to make a track unique.

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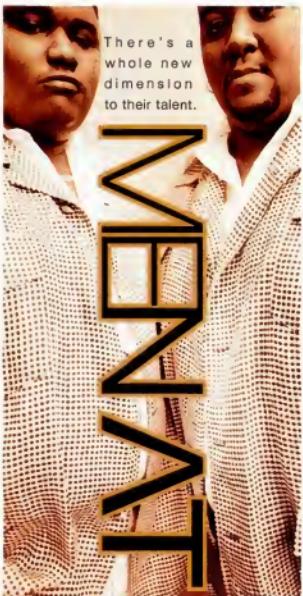
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R.E.M.

Monster • Warner Bros.

Although rhythm and blues aficionados would beat ya down with the idea that soul music legitimacy exists only in the colorful voices of black folks, there are a few palefaced cats who have dashed across the soul train tracks. Mick Jagger, Robert Plant, Elton John, David Bowie, Boy George, George Michael, and Michael Stipe are all compelling white-boy vocalists who wouldn't be outta place in the amen corner of a Baptist church.

Unlike Michael Bolton's house of painful groans, a jukebox caricature of spiritual ecstasy, the voice of R.E.M.'s lead crooner, Stipe, transforms his group's sonic blare into a congregation stare. On singles like "Everybody Hurts" and the Grammy-winning "Losing My Religion," you can hear the dusty pain in Stipe's phrasing, a confessional vision of hell that haunts his dreamy soundscape.

Lulled by the aural Prozac of their more melodic tunes, it's easy for one to forget that R.E.M. are a rock 'n' roll band. Their new *Monster* puts them back on the block of their noisy origins and Stipe's



buried-in-the-mix lyrics. R.E.M. don't do any sampling, but that doesn't stop them from quoting rock classics with their instruments. The opening track, "What's the Frequency, Kenneth?" (a line that a mugger kept repeating while attacking Dan Rather), starts with a guitar salute to Lou Reed's "Sweet Jane." "Bang and Blame" sounds like '80s Talking Heads as they burned down a house, and "Crush With Eyeliner" blatantly cops a Doors riff.

With R.E.M. stripped down to the basic structure of four dudes with instruments, guitarist Peter Buck once again gets a chance to flex Fender muscles on most of *Monster*'s 12 tracks. Returning to the art-house soul shack, Stipe's wailing balladeer performance of the haunting, beautiful "Strange Currencies" feels like walking in the rain with a lover. When he cries, "You will be mine," you can feel his powerful embrace.

While the production on *Monster* is smooth as crushed velvet, it's still as loud as a collapsing building. Stipe's voice offers spooky electric soul as the band expands and flies away on its own groove thang. As Wild Cherry might have said, "Play that introspective, funky music till ya die."

Michael A. Gonzales

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SCARFACE

The Diary • Rap-A-Lot/Noo Trybe/Virgin

He has a name that inspires awe in most God-fearing citizens and a tendency to enunciate every syllable in "muth-a-fuck-a" so as to completely elicit its venomous connotations. Scarface (a.k.a. Brad Jordan) is a huge blast of bravado. *The Diary*, his third solo album, is the sonic equivalent of a flat-top-in-the-air, blood-on-the-wall, helicopter-detonating, action-adventure flick. And he's the anti-hero.

The album opens with a sprawling, majestic slab of superficial themetype music. Then Scarface, veteran of Houston's much-revered Geto Boys, stuns his army with machine-gun sounds and all—through the charming melody and breaks into the gruesome, deadpan lyrics of "The White Sheet," with its eerie mantra: "Rat-tat-tat-tat to your ass, hit the motherfucking floor." Scarface oozes fearlessness.

He shows off his chops with black belt lethality. On "No Tears" and "Jesse James," Scarface surges forth with little reservation, rarely harnessing himself, erupting at every dramatic pause. "G" moves in a similar direction, over a mellow backbeat and electric rhythms that turn frenzied when the throaty rapper carves in his fiery musings. The thrill of *The Diary* is not just the luscious choruses—and there are plenty—but Scarface's ability to turn the sweet refrains inside out. On "Goin' Down," he gives the tune from Nena's bubbly 1984 hit "99 Luftballons" the mobster treatment, turning it into a sinister quasi-love song.

"Hand of the Dead Body" packs a stealthy bite, with the refrain "Amerikai always been known for blamin' us niggas for they fucked up and we were always considered evil." He goes on to call rap adversary the Rev. Calvin Butts a "hoe to the third degree" and Don Cornelius a "house nigga," and gives up a sincere "Fuck Bill and Hillary" for good measure.

But there is one exception to Scarface's scathing tirade. It's an updated, sleekly laid-back version of his former group's landmark song, which appears just as *The Diary* is closing out: "Mind Playin' Tricks '94" is a remarkably mild sequel in which Scarface's gangsta persona withdraws and jazzy guitar solos take over. Then he wraps his warm drawl around a series of grown-up realizations. Who would have expected the MC who gave the original version of the song its poison to gently snarl, "But it seems they wanna git me so I try to keep my 9 minn with me / Just in case they wanna see a home's head blown but I gotta stay around and see my kids grow"? Aida Vaziri

JAMES CARTER

JC on the Set • Columbia

Detroit-bred saxophonist James Carter has been an adjunct member of Wynton Marsalis's new jazz traditionalists since high school. But the first thing you notice on hearing JC on the Set, the 25-year-old's electrifying debut, is how truly imaginative and contemporary he is. Unlike many young lions, Carter refuses to dis the revolutionary developments that occurred in the wake of Ornette Coleman, Albert Ayler, and Maceo Parker.

This becomes apparent, for example, in the way he and his crew—pianist Craig Taborn, bassist Jaribu Shahid, and drummer Tani Tabebil—update Duke Ellington's "Caravan." As if in prayer before a long journey, the group surveys Ellington's sublime harmonies at the outset, then sets off up-tempo. Once they're on their way, Carter's blurred, robust baritone sax rolls atop the staunchly (post)modern accompaniment, effortlessly hurtling the 58-year-old composition forward through time.

The rest of JC on the Set makes it hard to believe that Carter grew up in the '70s and '80s, decades when pop music's audience allowed fusion and neoclassicism to stand for jazz's ever-expanding rhythms and improvisational daring. Of the album's eight tracks, Carter's three original compositions side right up next to tunes penned by Ellington (check: "Sophisticated Lady"), postwar tenor giant Don Byas, and Sun Ra, without sounding a bit out of place. But as Carter shifts from the hefty baritone sax (two cuts) to his usual tenor and then alto (three pieces), his solos draw steam from sources as disparate as "Rhapsody in Blue" and the theme from *Sanford and Son*, while also showing an unabashed bond with the free jazz of the '80s. The young man has obviously done all of his homework, and JC on the Set opens the door on a bright, shining future.

K. Leander Williams



RAPA ITI

The Tahitian Choir Vol. II • Shanachie

This album of Tahitian choral music, performed by people from the island of Oparo (known in the Western world as Rapa Iti), often music virtually unchanged since it was first performed by these singers' ancestors long ago. Sung in the Tahitians' native language, the lyrics reflect their everyday concerns (as detailed in the accompanying English liner notes), which turn out to be surprisingly similar to those found in today's popular music: The Rapas sing about spirituality, while Mariah Carey tops the charts with a gospel song; Joe's reworks of 18th-century Latin hymns, and the Beastie Boys pay homage with "Bodhisattva Vow." Other Rapa songs are concerned with danger, death, and everyday life; parallels can be found in pretty much all of hip hop. The music is "old" but reflects a strong connection to the modern world.

Musically, though, the Rapa's expression is unique to their culture. The 126-person choir divide into as many as 16 groups, each singing a distinct melody. The melodies are based on microtonal scales that include pitch fluctuations considerably more subtle than those found in Western classical composition. They overlap and intertwine, creating complex harmonies that shift, bend, and waver in a swooping, organic manner. In "Te Moko Maitai," divergent layers of voices weave a background for a high-pitched, keening melody that floats on top. And the Rapas are at their most spectacular in "Ua Purapuru Ta'ou E" ("Accompaniment Chants for Those Between Worlds").

In Rapa mythology, microtonal chants open windows to spiritual dimensions. At the very least, these songs create an unsettling, nearly disorienting effect (as the liner notes caution). But even setting mythology aside, this Tahitian music astounds with its beauty and purity of expression, as well as its long-reaching roots. The music elegantly proves the timeless relevance of the oral tradition. Suzanne McErlane



FU-SCHNICKENS

Nervous Breakdown • Five

The first time you hear Chip-Fu's wheezing, hiccuping, ragamuffin-cum-Roger-Rabbit verse on "Breakdown," the opening cut on *Nervous Breakdown*, you can't help thinking that he was ricocheting around the sound booth during his take: eyes popping, tongue wagging, steam spurting from his ears—like some Timberland-clad version of Jim Carrey in *The Mask*. Though their live shows are legendary, it would be almost a shame to see the Fu-Schnickens onstage after hearing this record. Why risk ruining that image?

Describing what the Fu-Schnickens have as "mike skills" is like saying that Mario Andretti can hella parallel park. On 1991's *F.U. - Don't Take It Personal*, true Fu-Schnicks Chip, Moc, and Poc were the first hip hoppers to turn the mike battle into a karate flick: lightning fast, dancehall-style chatting, flashy backward rhyming, and gratuitous duck sauce. They made rap that sounds the way break dancing looks.

Now, having sat out the past two years' promenade of vocal acrobats (Pharcyde, Freestyle Fellowship, Supernatural, Wu-Tang), the Brooklyn stutters are back with a new playbook, ready to cause their peers a titular *Nervous Breakdown*. In the flat-out hyper-chat "Crazy"—which will appear only on the forthcoming soundtrack to *Love Down Dirty Shame*—Chip and his cohorts probably break the current Guinness record for rhyme speed (currently held by Chicago's Tung Twista). When Chip trills, "You can never bite my style / Because it's very hard to swallow," he drops the group's main MO: Like beboppers in the '50s, Fu-Schnickens use a style that's simply too difficult to be copied.

Since they define the extremes of their art, it makes sense that the Fu-Schnickens would find a friend in Orlando Magician Shaquille O'Neal, who names them as his fave group on last year's *Shaq Diesel*. The Shaq takes a brief half-verse on *Nervous Breakdown's* tensely bumping "What's Up Doc (Can We Rock?)" after the trio has already wrecked, and does an admirable job. Still, it's like watching the janitor shoot free throws after Jordan's dropped by for some hoops. *Chris Norris*



Fu-Schnickens

HORACE BROWN

Taste Your Love • Uptown/MCA

Today's male balladeers are like potential boyfriends—just when you think you've found someone to give you roses and romance, you find out all he wants to do is get into your pants. The newest contender for the Loveman title is Horace Brown, who debuts with *Taste Your Love*. But Brown's biggest problem is that the listener is a jacked lover: I've/she's/we've heard it all before.

At least Al B. Sure!, Christopher Williams, and Jodeci promise to love you forever after they musically seduce you, but Brown mostly commits only to making you feel good sexually. If the album's title hasn't already clued you in, check lyrics like "Freak me / Be my nasty girl" or "Lick me baby / All over / And I'll never let you go / 'Cause you're my nasty lover / And I'm your Scorpio."

But given the raunchiness of today's musical climate, and the radio-ready new jack swing that permeates most of Brown's album, *Taste Your Love* could easily prove a huge hit. Brown's warm tenor slides its way seductively through the songs, several of which he wrote or cowrote: Jodeci's De'Vante Swing and Dave "Jam" Hall of Mary J. Blige fame craft tracks replete with sophisticated, jeep-ready beats.

But it's when Brown's hip hop influences give way to more classic R&B that his true talent is revealed. "Holding On" is enhanced by Swing's skill with the keyboards and Brown's own deft vocals. The song slowly builds to a peak of dramatic intensity. And it just gets better with "How Am I Supposed to Know?," a ballad about the uncertainty of relationships, and "I Gotta Find a Way," in which Brown is a heartbroken lover dealing with the pain of loss.

These songs reveal the passionate Horace Brown—as opposed to the sex-obsessed superlover he presents on other parts of his debut. Like everyone else, Brown finds that love makes him insecure, sensitive, and vulnerable; displaying these emotions through song is what will eventually endear him to listeners. *Tanya Pendleton*



Horace Brown

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A FEW GOOD MEN

A Thang for You • LaFace

As if the R&B market weren't already flooded with supposedly gospel-trained groups made up of four or five desirable young men tirelessly moaning, groaning, and pumping their pelvic bones, here's yet another group joining the ranks of the choral mack daddies. And like their countless contemporaries with three- and four-part harmonies—Silk, Boyz II Men, Jodeci, Shai, Portrait, Intro, All-4-One—A Few Good Men reek of can't-miss urban-contemporary success on their debut.

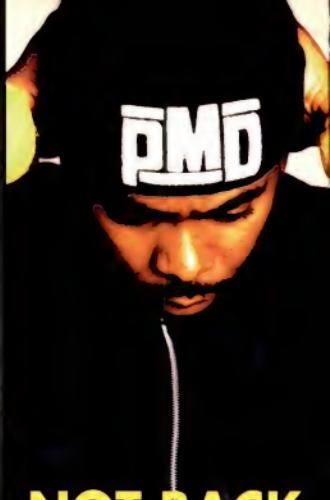
Packed with ballads, *A Thang for You* leads us on a journey through overly charted waters. The Men's 12-track debut includes numerous "sounds a lot like so-and-so" radio hits for the picking. Still, with catchy hooks and macho bravado, AFGM seem sure to become the new heartthrobs



of prepubescent (and even some grown-up) girls everywhere.

But while *Thang* is an enjoyable, mostly harmless listen, it's yet another indication that boy groups are in one serious rut. Each of AFGM's songs is about bumping, grinding, or enticing some girl to "let her long, pretty hair down" so they can "make her sweat," as one member croons in the album's raunchiest song, "1-800-GMAN (How I Say I Love You)." During the cold nights this winter, surely a lot of folks will be winding their bodies while A Few Good Men's groove plays in the background. Unfortunately, though, it's a groove that keeps getting played over and over again.

Diane R. Paylor



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La Rockco Tee
Sump'n Ta Bounce To
Outburst/RAL

What the world needs has finally arrived... The first single from the Chicago native that's bound for high altitudes. La Rockco Tee proves that he is a rebel for true old-school Hip-Hop with strong bass lines and an urban funk hook. Check the single that's definitely "Sump'n Ta Bounce To."

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CODE: 7610

Mel-low
Money, Houses And Clothes
DJ West / RAL

What more could a player ask for? The most recognized player from the Compton, LA scene is back with this Prodigy (South Central Cartel) produced funk track. Blowin' up the spot with his care-free, good-time approach, MEL-LOW has the key to the ultimate LA lifestyle. MEL-LOW bridges the gap between East and West coast funk, while being a hustler with all the... "Money, Houses and Clothes" ... he could ever need.

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CODE: 7611

Jayo Felony
Brothers and Sisters
JMJ/RAL

From the Jason's Lyric soundtrack, Jayo Felony is ready to... "blow up from the floor up," with his JMJ records release "Brothers and Sisters." Representing South East San Diego, Jayo is giving props to the real Brothers and Sisters that are staying true to survival in the wicked streets. Produced by Jam Master Jay & Tony T-Funk Peayer, the deep bass line and soothing melody are guaranteed to satisfy the real... "Brothers and Sisters."

JMJ R&B

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THE DETAILS

VIBE Fashion Dinner for Two page 98

(Clockwise) Claudia: Rubber dress and net shawl, both by Vivienne Westwood available by special order only (call in London at 44-71-629-3757); black patent heels by Vivienne Westwood \$225 available at Bergdorf Goodman, N.Y.C., and Comme des Fous, L.A.; necklace by Renée Lewis available at Barneys New York, N.Y.C. Spencer: Brown velvet jacket \$2,000, wool pant \$510, and silk dress shirt \$910, all by Giorgio Armani, available at the Giorgio Armani Boutique, N.Y.C. and Beverly Hills; pyramid necklace by Renée Lewis available at Barneys New York, N.Y.C. Jimmy: Brown mud plaid jacket \$880 and pant \$585, both by John Bartlett (for more information call 212-647-9409); ascot by Alfred Dunhill \$55 available at Alfred Dunhill, N.Y.C. or Beverly Hills; green parasol beret by Rod Keenan \$10 available at Barneys New York, N.Y.C. and Beverly Hills. Joia: Leopard single-sleeve dress by Rebecca Danberg \$80 available at Rebecca Danenberg, 143 Ludlow Street, N.Y.C.; white patent Tojo pumps by Manolo Blahnik \$395 available at Bergdorf Goodman, N.Y.C., and Neiman Marcus, select stores; white Raven sunglasses by Arnet \$78 available at Supreme, 274 Lafayette Street, N.Y.C.; I LOVE YOU rhinestone bracelet by Marc Jacobs. T'ning: Leopard sleeveless dress by Jeffrey Costello \$250 made to order (call 212-966-4517); necklace by Marc Jacobs.

page 99

(Top photo) Lopeti: Satin suit by Dolce & Gabbana \$1,050 available at Barneys New York, N.Y.C. and L.A., and Riccardi, Boston; satin shirt by William Beranek at Nick Hallack & Associates \$145 available at Traffic, L.A., and Moda, Pittsburgh; maroon silk tie by Thierry Mugler \$15 available at I Magnin, San Francisco and L.A.; Air Max 2 CB by Nike \$135 (for stores near you call 503-671-3939). (Bottom photo, left to right) Hiram: Black viscose cardigan by Front Homme Tech \$200 available at IF, Soho, N.Y.C., and Traffic, L.A.; black dress shirt \$250, tie \$145, both by Comme des Garçons available at Comme des Garçons Boutique, Soho, N.Y.C., and Maxfield, L.A.; tie tuck by David Donahue \$30 available at Macy's nationwide; LOSER necklace by Vass Luderac at Showroom Seven \$220 available at Barneys New York, N.Y.C., and Neiman Marcus, select stores. Fred: Pastel wool/cotton crepe jacket \$495 and pants \$260 by William Beranek at Nick Hallack & Associates available at Traffic, L.A., and Moda, Pittsburgh; cotton dress shirt \$90 and tie \$48, both by Alberto Biani for New York available at Maxfield, L.A.; tweed panama porkpie hat by Rod Keenan \$180 available at Barneys New York, N.Y.C. Robin: White organza silk jacket by Philosophy di Ferretti \$260. Marc: Embroidered jacket \$1,411 and pant \$752, both by Yohji Yamamoto available at the Yohji Yamamoto Boutique, N.Y.C., and Wilkes Bashford, San Francisco; lime shirt by SO \$220 available at Charivari, N.Y.C., and Saks Fifth Avenue, select

stores; tie by Alberto Biani for New York \$48 available at Maxfield, L.A.; aviator glasses by Ray Ban \$95 available at Fun Gear and Sunglass Hut nationwide.

page 100

Shawn: Navy pinstripe jacket \$960 and pant \$350 by Ahmad Akkad at Nick Hallack & Associates available at IF, Soho, N.Y.C., and Untitled, N.Y.C.; mesh silver polo shirt by SO \$185 from a collection available at Saks Fifth Avenue, select stores, and Ron Ross, Studio City, Calif.; silver Starbitte western hat by Rod Keenan \$260 available at Barneys New York, N.Y.C. and Beverly Hills.

page 101

Rachel: Vinyl pink trench coat by Rebecca Danenberg \$150 available at Rebecca Danenberg, 143 Ludlow Street, N.Y.C.; vinyl bra by Debra Marquit \$75 available at Patricia Fields, N.Y.C., and Playmates, L.A.

page 102

(Top photo) See page 98 credits. (Bottom photo) Joia: Leopard single-sleeve dress by Rebecca Danenberg \$80 available at Rebecca Danenberg, 143 Ludlow Street, N.Y.C.; white Raven sunglasses by Arnet \$78 available at Supreme, 274 Lafayette Street, N.Y.C.; I LOVE YOU rhinestone bracelet by Marc Jacobs. Gary: Lace-up wool vest by Thierry Mugler \$360 available at Saks Fifth Avenue nationwide, and the 24 Collection, Miami; brown striped viscose shirt by Dolce & Gabbana \$340 available at Neiman Marcus, select stores, and Moda, Pittsburgh; tie by Alfred Dunhill \$55 available at Alfred Dunhill, N.Y.C. and Beverly Hills; upholstered bowler hat by Rod Keenan \$300 available to order through Worth & Worth, 331 Madison Avenue, N.Y.C.

page 103

(Top photo) Andrew: Band-collar dress shirt \$185 by Donna Karan Collection available at Stanley Korshak, Dallas; black sheer sleeveless shirt by John Paul Gaultier \$1,289 available at I Magnin, San Francisco, and by special order through Charivari, N.Y.C.; red crystal necklace by Erickson Beamon at Showroom Seven \$270 available at Neiman Marcus, select stores, and Blake, Chicago. T'ning: Leopard sleeveless dress by Jeffrey Costello \$250 made to order (call 212-966-4517); necklace by Marc Jacobs. Tanga: Blue satin dress shirt with silversnaps by Dolce & Gabbana \$320 available at Barneys, San Francisco, and Neiman Marcus, select stores; silver mechanism watch by Paul Smith \$250 available at Paul Smith, 108 Fifth Avenue, N.Y.C.

(Bottom photo) Zulema: Green tweed cardigan, hot pant, and boots, all by Marc Jacobs. Jimmy: See page 98 credit.

page 104

(Clockwise from top left) Mickey: Checked jacket \$530 and vest \$135, both by Katherine Hamnett available at

Barneys New York, N.Y.C. and Beverly Hills, and Fred Segal, L.A.; striped dress shirt by MNW Collection \$180 available at Barneys New York, N.Y.C. and Beverly Hills; silk tie by Thierry Mugler \$115 available at Giorgio, Toronto, and Settepui, Phoenix; sunglasses by Christian Roth for Optical Affairs \$2,000 available at My Optics, N.Y.C., and Optical Designs, Santa Monica, Calif. Masha: Black robe-cut coat \$1,945 available at Maxfield, L.A., and Wilkes Bashford, San Francisco; red glitter T-shirt \$229 available at Chanvari, N.Y.C., and Roppongi, L.A., all by Jean Paul Gaultier; "Jackie O." sunglasses by TG-170 \$35 available at TG-170, 170 Ludlow Street, N.Y.C. Mark: See page 3 TCK credit. Luciana: Black fish-tail rubber dress by Syren \$350 available at Syren, L.A. Robin: Lamé halter top \$125 and lamé pantie \$40, both available at Macy's (East Coast), lace skirt \$250 made to order (call 212-966-4517), all by Jeffrey Costello; ankle-strap heels by Frederick's of Hollywood \$48 available at Frederick's of Hollywood, L.A. (or call for catalog 800-323-9525). Voula: Black velvet 3/4 coat \$465, matching satin pajama pant \$285, and scarf vest \$195, all by DKNY available at Bloomingdale's, N.Y.C., and Nordstrom, select stores; rhinestone cross necklace by Marie Ferré \$40 available at Fragments, Soho, N.Y.C. Lopeti: Satin suit by Dolce & Gabbana \$1,015 available at Barneys New York, N.Y.C. and L.A., and Riccardi, Boston; satin shirt by William Beranek at Nick Hallack & Associates \$145 available at Traffic, L.A., and Moda, Pittsburgh; maroon silk tie by Thierry Mugler \$115 available at I Magnin, San Francisco and L.A.; Air Max² CB by Nike \$135 (for stores near you call 503-671-3939). Shawn and Zulema: See above credits. Spencer: See above credits.

Next

B-Girls

page 48 and 49

Billy: Yellow raincoat \$225 available at Macy's (East Coast); leopard-print bra top by Jeffrey Costello \$100 made to order (call 212-966-4517); hot pink sequin pant by Jeanette Kastenberg \$300 made to order (call 212-947-4746); gold loafer heels by Gianni Versace. Brigitte: Off-the-shoulder fur-trimmed dress by Jeanette Kastenberg \$190 available at Henri Bendel, N.Y.C., and Fred Hayman, Beverly Hills; ankle-strap heels by Frederick's of Hollywood \$48 available at Frederick's of Hollywood, L.A. (or call for catalog 800-323-9525). Brandy: Yellow satin hooded zip-front jacket by Jeanette Kastenberg \$300 available at Macy's (East Coast), and Fred Hayman, Beverly Hills; star T-shirt by TG-170 \$20 available at TG-170, 170 Ludlow Street, N.Y.C.; vinyl A-line shirt by Lipservice \$44 available at Canal Jean, N.Y.C., and 9th Street Moda, Miami Beach; knee-length boots by Robert Clergerie \$650 available at Barneys New York, N.Y.C. Mimi: Pink lamé halter dress by Jeffrey Costello approximately \$375 available at Macy's (East Coast); boa by Jeanette Kastenberg \$30 made to order (call 212-947-4746); black combat boots by Dirk Bikkembergs \$375 available at Barneys New York, N.Y.C. Nicci: Blue lamé halter dress by Jeffrey Costello approximately \$375 available at Macy's (East Coast); blue gorilla-hair chubby by Jeanette Kastenberg \$300 made to order (call 212-947-4746); black combat boots by Dirk Bikkembergs \$375 available at Barneys New York, N.Y.C.

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3275 Dr. Dre	6072 Dr. Dre	3443 TLC	7443 TLC
3275 Dr. Dre	6073 Dr. Dre	3444 TLC	7444 TLC

PROPS

LIEUTENANT UHURA (NICHELLE NICHOLS)

1967 and Nichelle Nichols has had it. After her first TV season playing *Star Trek's* Lieutenant Uhura, she tells Gene Roddenberry—the show's creator and her onetime boyfriend—"the quiet NBC execs have cut her scenes to ribbons." Racism, sexism, and studio personnel have insulted Nichols to her face, made her work days hellish, and convulsed tons of her fan mail so she'd think this was no big deal, when all the while she's aware as popular as Kirk and Spock! Roddenberry swears, "I'll improve the next year, people with her to say... but Nichols just can't see how it could be worth it. The following night she goes to an NAACP fund-raiser, where a friend introduces her to a big fan of *Star Trek* and of Uhura—"Dr. Martin Luther King."

According to Nichols's new autobiography, *Beyond Uhura: Star Trek and Other Adventures in Public Life*, it was Dr. King who took her into staying on the show. "You have opened a door that must not be allowed to close. I'm sure you have taken a lot of grief, but you changed the face of television forever. You have created a character of dignity and grace and beauty and intelligence. Don't you see that you're not just a role model for little black children? You're more important to people who don't look like us. For the first time, the world sees us as equals, as intelligent people—as we should be... Remember, you are not as we should be... Remember, you are not important there in spite of your color. You are important there because of your color."

For many of my white contemporaries, in grade school when *Star Trek* originally aired, Nichelle Nichols would become their first ethnic heartthrob. For many still largely segregated Americans who watched the low-rated series before it became a syndication gold mine, she'd be the only black woman they'd see regularly on the tube outside of the network news. The weird intimacy of steady viewership over 28 years has given Uhura a mystique rarely she now shares with the rest of the Enterprise crew.

But it's Nichols's life before and after Uhura that makes her so much more than a '60s icon. Duke Ellington discovered Nichols when he was a teenager, giving her a gig as a singer/dancer. A single

working mother in the '50s, she brought attempted rape charges against a white Canadian lawyer and got him convicted. Then, in just five years, she went from playing a bit part in the film *Porgy and Bess* to mounting the first West Coast staging of James Baldwin's *The Amen Corner*. In the mid-'70s, she founded her own non-profit educational production company, Women in Motion, and spearheaded NASA's first successful recruitment drive for female and minority astronauts—all commitments she ardently maintains today. Nichols told me recently, with wistful satisfaction, that Dr. King had been quite pleased with himself because he'd kept her on *Star Trek*. Today he'd likely be prouder still.

Robert Moraes



Newport

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